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'S.E. Food Project' engages Inner Southeast neighbors

Created on Thursday, 07 February 2013 09:00 | Written by [Peter Korchnak](#) |

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Six times a year – every other month’s “second Saturday”, Dawn Johnston visits her neighbors to pick up a green bag from their porches. The bags contains food items the neighbors donate to the “Southeast Food Project”, a nonprofit organization that this month is celebrating its first year of collecting food for local residents in need. On her most recent pickup, in December, Johnston collected 210 lbs. of food from fifteen donors. By contrast, she said, “On my first pickup, a year ago, I got 70 lbs. of food from four neighbors.”



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An all-volunteer organization, the S.E. Food Project is the brainchild of Richard Nudelman, who brought the model to Southeast Portland from Ashland and Medford, where it has been in operation since 2009. Donated food goes to pantries at the S.E. Community Center and Kelly School.

“All donated food stays right here in the community,” Nudelman said. “Whereas the post office drive is a food drive, ours is a donor drive. We’re hoping to get more people involved.”

Johnson recruits additional residents of her Lexington Heights area of Woodstock as one of the Project’s fifteen neighborhood coordinators. To Nudelman, it’s people like Johnston, whom he’d met at a dog park, who are the key to the Project’s success. He explained, “Folks respond well when their neighbors ask them for help. If everybody gives a little – whatever they can give – before you know it, you have thousands of pounds of food.”

Nudelman illustrated the program’s growth: Last February, area-wide, 18 people donated 347 lbs. of food. But by December, the Project collected 2,700 lbs. from 225 people. Nudelman added,



by: PETER KORCHNAK - Woodstock resident
Dawn Johnston, and her daughter Emma,



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“We’re aiming for 4,000 lbs. on our first anniversary.”

pick up a food donation from neighbor Randy Eisenbeisz last December 8th.

Future growth will come not only from neighbors but also from the younger generation, Nudelman suggested. Johnston brings her three kids, Owen, 12, Emma, 11, and Norah, 6, along on the donation pickups. They carry full bags to the car, driven by Johnston’s husband Brian, and as they pick up the full bags, they give donors new bags to fill. “My kids have no experience with poverty,” Johnston said. “I want them to have an awareness of the community around them and the neighbors in need.”

If you’d like to join this effort, learn more about how to get involved with the Southeast Food Project online at: www.southeastfoodproject.com



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