

Leadership class collecting goods for needy

BY MATT ERICKSON

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For one winter while she was growing up in Leavenworth, Sharon Tuttle's family had no income while her father recovered from open-heart surgery.

Only because of the kindness of others was her family able to continue eating while her father couldn't work. So, you could say collecting goods to stock food pantries is a cause close to her heart.

"If it wasn't for a couple of the local charities in Leavenworth, we would have had a lot of trouble," Tuttle said.

Tuttle, an escrow closer for Kansas Secured Title in Tonganoxie, is one of 16 students in the 2011-12 Southern Leavenworth County Leadership Development class helping to organize a food drive during the month of February. The drive — which is also collecting sundry items such as paper towels, shampoo and shaving cream in addition to nonperishable food items — will benefit food pantries serving Tonganoxie, Basehor, Leavenworth and Lansing.

The leadership class's collections in Tonganoxie will go to the Good Shepherd Thrift Shop's food pantry, and donations in Basehor will go to the Basehor-Linwood Assistance Services pantry at Basehor United Methodist Church.

Goods collected in Leavenworth and Lansing will go to Leavenworth Assistance Center and Catholic Charities in Leavenworth.

Brad Eccles, assistant director of the Tonganoxie Recreation Commission and another student in the 21st annual edition of the leadership class, said the class members decided this time of year would be ripe for a food and goods drive, as giving to charitable organizations can hit a lull after the holiday season ends.

"After the first of the year, the giving drops off, so we're trying to refill those places," Eccles said.

Though class members have set out collection boxes at a number of places around the county, they've also tried to be more creative in their mission, Eccles said. For instance, he has challenged fifth- and sixth-graders on 12 Tonganoxie recreational basketball

teams to compete to collect the most goods for the drive. The winning team will get a pizza party.

Eccles said he hoped the contest would encourage the children to think about the purpose of the drive.

"As long as the kids kind of think about, 'Hey, there are kids out there who don't have anything,'" Eccles said.

In Basehor, class members will col-

lect goods at Basehor-Linwood High School on Friday as the basketball teams take on Bonner Springs. Jennifer Bizzell, a Basehor resident taking part in the class, said they hadn't picked the rivalry matchup on accident.

"We knew we were going to have high attendance," Bizzell said.

In Leavenworth and Lansing, where Tuttle is helping to lead the effort, class members are collecting goods in person at Dillons in Lansing and Wal-Mart in Leavenworth.

Tuttle asked for county residents to consider that a host of things — the loss of a job, sickness or other hardships —

can leave families in need, and many families in the county do need help. It's something she knows from experience.

"It's special for me," Tuttle said.

The leadership class was established as a joint venture between the Tonganoxie and Basehor chambers of commerce.

Students meet monthly from September to May, usually in Basehor and hear from guest speakers on various topics, such as education and local government. Students also tour the Leavenworth County Courthouse and Justice Center, the statehouse in Topeka and the Lawrence Journal-World.

BASEHOR DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

Residents can donate at Basehor Community Library, First State Bank and Trust, Community National Bank, Dollar General, Sarah's Studio of Dance and Kansas Secured Title. Class members will also collect donations Friday at the Basehor-Linwood High School home basketball games against Bonner Springs.

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