

This is the season for giving

Gowrie Challenge fights hunger on the shoreline

By Ann Gamble
Special to the Times

Increasing numbers of shoreline families live paycheck to paycheck and must make tough choices between medication, heat or food. These families can move faster than they ever thought possible, from working to working-poor, or even to unemployed.

Suddenly they may find themselves clients of the food pantry they once supported.

The saving grace for those in need is the Shoreline Soup Kitchens & Pantries (SSK&P) which provides area residents with weekly groceries distribution and meal sites.

Where does the funding for the estimated 900,000 meals provided each year come from? For the past seven years nearly a third has come from the Gowrie Corporate Challenge.

The Gowrie Group matches the first \$25,000 in corporate and individual donations; LC Doane Company matches the next \$5,000, and The Safety Zone matches the final \$5,000 for a total of \$70,000. The challenge ends Dec. 31.

Demand for SSK&P food assistance has increased by 20 percent, with 8 percent of area residents living below the poverty line. These sobering statistics make it harder to provide weekly groceries and



Gowrie employees serve lunch at the soup kitchen. Front row from left: Carolyn Hart, Stephanie Peck, Lindas Dillon; second row from left: Cathy Benzi, Mary Diaz, Nancy Sprigg, Michelle Walsh, Jeannette ZDavis; back from left: Rod Clingman, Andrea Ward, Sarah Davidson, Mimi Adkins, Midge Smith.

meals, and harder to meet the Challenge.

Donations in any amount make a difference. Through the buying power of SSK&P at the Connecticut Food Bank, one meal costs about 25 cents; a \$5 donation provides 20 meals, and \$25 can supply 100 meals.

SSK&P Executive Director

Patty Dowling sees the Gowrie Corporate Challenge as crucial in dollars raised, but also in "the creativity it inspires in other companies." Some employers match employee donations, and then donate to the Gowrie Corporate Challenge, effectively tripling individual donations.

According to Carter Gowrie, president and CEO of the Westbrook based Gowrie Group, the company originally chose SSKP as the beneficiary of the challenge because "we wanted to give back to the community. We're very entrenched in the shoreline area. Our employees come

from Branford to Mystic, and when we talked with Patty Dowling (executive director of SSKP), it was a no-brainer to partner with SSK&P."

Whitney Peterson, Gowrie Group vice president of mar-

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keting, said “the shoreline soup kitchens serves 11 towns, and this is where our employees our, and our clients are. It’s a very broad service area, rather than just being focused in one town.”

Gowrie Group employees are involved in the food assistance effort year round

Gowrie employee, Community Garden volunteer, and SSKP Board of Trustees member Lindas Dillon said that her food drive project and the lunches served by employees

at meal sites a few times a year help the employees become involved on top of the corporate challenge.

“It’s overwhelming to me how kind and generous people are. I am grateful to work and live in a community where people have made the decision that those in need of assistance are going to be able to get food for their families. I can’t be more grateful and thankful,” Dowling said of the Challenge and other community efforts.

Considering donating to the challenge? Rest assured that any amount counts twice, and

if hard times hit close to home, SSK&P will be there to help. This holiday season is a great time to pay it forward.

The Gowrie Challenge runs through Dec. 31. Online donations may be made in any amount through shorelinesoup-kitchens.org (click on Donate, select Gowrie Group Corporate Challenge). Checks may be mailed to The Shoreline Soup Kitchens & Pantries, attn: Gowrie Group Corporate Challenge, P.O. Box 804, Essex, CT 06426.