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Group gets surplus food to needy

Volunteers deliver eateries' leftovers to pantries

By Chris Sikich

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NOBLESVILLE — John Williamson hit upon a simple idea to feed the hungry.

Williamson, 41, Noblesville, contacted restaurants and found that many would donate surplus food at the end of the day rather than throw it away.

Now, through an effort called Food Rescue, about 500 volunteers gather and drop off food to local pantries such as Third Phase in Noblesville and Gleaners Food Bank in Indianapolis. Retail value of the food donated so far, he said, is about \$600,000.

It started in November when Williamson and his wife, Carol, decided they wanted to pick up the food themselves at Panera Bread in Noblesville. Williamson soon had hundreds of volunteers picking up food throughout the week at about 15 restaurants in Carmel, Fishers, Noblesville, Westfield and Indianapolis.

He officially formed the nonprofit Food Rescue group this year.

"We're connecting food banks, restaurants and citizens," he said.

Hamilton County Health Administrator Barry McNulty said Food Rescue and Third Phase are handling the food with care, and he hasn't heard of any health concerns.

Chapters also have been started in California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin and other parts of Indiana.

Williamson, who operates a real estate company and co-founded Heritage Classic Foundation to raise money for multiple sclerosis, credits God for the growth of Food Rescue in 11 months.

Williamson asks volunteers to help out once a month for 90 minutes. After people find out how easy it is to help, he said, they quickly jump on board.

"We're already spending the resources to make the food, but then it's going in the trash," Williamson



STEVE SANCHEZ / The Noblesville Ledger

Dawn Robinson (from left), Stephanie Maschino, Ronica Polk and Deborah Pittman bagged boxes of bagels Monday at Third Phase after receiving a donation from Food Rescue and Panera Bread. John Williamson, Noblesville, organized the nonprofit Food Rescue group this year.

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John Williamson, Food Rescue group organizer

said. "A lot of people are like me and think that's insane."

Patty and Dave Bukowski, Noblesville, have been picking up food with their children, Laura, 17, Michael, 15, Kimberly, 10, and Timothy, 4.

"I think it's fantastic, and I wish it was going on a lot longer than it has," Patty Bukowski said of Food Rescue. "We are a country that is wasteful."

★ Call Star reporter Chris Sikich at (317) 444-5545.



Todd Hartley, shift supervisor for Panera Bread, bagged up bagels Monday for Food Rescue.

FOOD RESCUE

To learn more about Food Rescue, visit www.foodrescue.net, call John Williamson at (317) 694-4006 or send e-mail to him at jw@foodrescue.net