

Long Island Business NEWS

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The Island's hunger pain

By Paule Pachter

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The poor national economy continues to compel many Americans to make difficult choices pertaining to their quality of life. Long Islanders haven't been spared the task of making many any of these choices either. As described in a 2006 study sponsored by America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank Network, there are an estimated 260,000 people on Long Island who are affected by hunger and potential malnutrition, including 93,000 children and 39,000 senior citizens.

The hunger population on Long Island is comprised of the poor, disabled, unemployed and a growing number of people who are struggling to survive in one of the most costly regions in the country.

As I travel around both our counties to meet with our network of pantries and soup kitchens, I see the faces of the people waiting in line for cans of soup, vegetables, cereal, fresh produce and other food items. With each visit I hear about an increase of between 25 percent and 30 percent in the number of new families turning to our pantries and soup kitchens for assistance.

The increase in the number of people relying on the support of food banks and food rescue organizations on Long Island is directly related to the poor economy. People are having difficulty paying their mortgages, purchasing their prescription medications, paying their property taxes and choosing between purchasing food and gas for their vehicles at \$4.25 per gallon. In some cases it's a battle between driving and surviving.

The face of hunger is dramatically changing on Long Island. It's not contained to any community or culture. While the national poverty level for a family of four is approximately \$22,000 there are a growing number of families on Long Island earning between \$45,000 and \$70,000 that are turning to our pantries for some type of assistance. And, if the economy doesn't improve and this trend continues, we will probably see the numbers of the hungry on Long Island increase.

The late Harry Chapin founded Long Island Cares 28 years ago to address the issue of hunger on Long Island. Harry was 37 years old when he founded the nonprofit food bank one year before his untimely death in July 1981. Twenty-seven years have passed since Harry's death and the issue of hunger on Long Island is becoming more critical than it ever was with more than 10 percent of our neighbors turning to pantries and food banks for assistance. Harry Chapin once said; "To know is to care. To care is to act. To act is to make a difference."

It's time to make a difference.

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