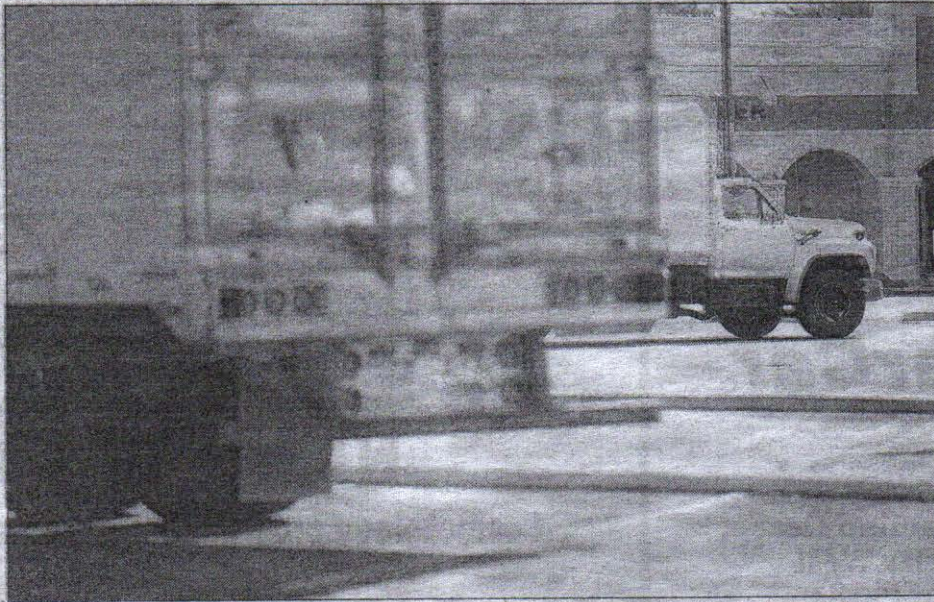


# Trucks trouble food bank neighbors



NICK COTE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City residents near the Valley View Community Food Bank have noticed more trucks in the area since the food bank moved into Sun City.

JEFF DEMPSEY  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Valley View Community Food Bank moved from Youngtown to its new location at 107th and Peoria avenues in Sun City more than two months ago, but the food bank and its neighbors are still getting used to each other.

David Erickson, a member of Valley View Community Food Bank's board of directors, attended this week's meeting of the Sun City Home Owners Association Board of Directors in response to a handful of complaints from Sun Citians who live near the food bank or visit Fairway Recreation Center across the street.

"Valley View wants to be a good neighbor to the community," Erickson said. "And I think we're doing it the right way."

He said there are in excess of 300 volunteers at the food bank, feeding more than 400 families per day.

"What was once just an empty building is now alive with activity," he said.

That activity, however, is at the heart of many of the complaints.

SEE SCHOA, A5

## SCHOA

FROM A1

Jim Powell, the SCHOA board's vice president, said SCHOA has heard from community members who do not like the number of trucks parked in front of the building.

"We don't want it to look like a storage area," he said, "and I was under the impression those trucks would be parked somewhere else. Compliance has gotten a lot of calls on this."

Bill Szentmiklosi, SCHOA general manager, said he and Valley View Executive Director Jesse Ramirez have been in touch about the community's

concerns, and they are being addressed.

"(Ramirez) is going to make an effort to park the trailers in the loading dock on a regular basis," he said. "We are working closely with Valley View on this."

Pete Granucci, secretary of SCHOA's board, thanked Erickson for attending the meeting on Valley View's behalf and said he has confidence any issues will be ironed out.

"Valley View has always been a good neighbor to Sun City," Granucci said. "There is no reason to believe anything will change now that they are in Sun City."

Jeff Dempsey may be reached at 623-876-2531 or [jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com](mailto:jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com).



# Thieves target food bank's storage trucks

MITCHELL VANTREASE  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Valley View Community Food Bank trucks have been vandalized three times in the last few months, the organization's executive director said Tuesday.

Jesse Ramirez said one of the trucks was recently repaired at a cost of more than \$3,000.

Ramirez said someone cut the wires on the batteries and that caused problems with the compressor, which is needed to keep the cooling unit operating in the truck.

"I'm glad we noticed it because we were able to get the food out just in time and put it in storage somewhere before it spoiled," Ramirez said.

And the same thing has happened to two of his other trucks at the food bank's new location, 107th and Peoria avenues in Sun City.

"It's just a shame that someone wants to hurt an organization that's doing some good," Ramirez said.

David Erickson, a member of Valley

SEE CHARITY, A5



NICK COTE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jesse Ramirez, founder of Valley View Community Food Bank, shows where one of the food bank's trucks was vandalized.

D N-S

Oct, 3, 2012

## CHARITY

FROM A1

View's board of directors, said: "People are trying to do the right thing and then someone went out there and did this. We're trying our best to keep it as secure as possible. It angers me when you have an organization trying to help people, and others trying to tear it down."

Erickson and Ramirez said most of the trucks have been moved to the loading docks at the food bank, and many of the drivers make routine checks.

There also has been talk of hiring security, but Ramirez said the organization can't af-

ford it.

"I've even come out early in the morning just to check if anything is happening," he said.

In the last few weeks, the food bank's trucks have come under scrutiny. Last week, the Sun City Home Owner's Association addressed some residents' concerns about the number of trucks parked in the front of the building across the street from Fairway Recreation Center.

"Having the vandalism happen to us along with the complaints makes us feel like the red-headed stepchild," he said. "I'm just trying to be a good neighbor to our residents, especially because 41 percent of our clientele is from Sun City."



# Food bank welcomes neighbors

JEFF DEMPSEY  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Mattie Lou Hill and Carol McCabe live in Sun City and, to be more specific, just down the street from the Valley View Community Food Bank at 107th and Peoria avenues.

They were among the first members of the community to walk through the food bank's doors Saturday for its open house, a chance for residents to see how the food bank operates and meet the people who run it.

"We're very interested in the community, and we like to keep up with what's going on," Hill said. "The food bank is our neighbor so we wanted to stop by."

Valley View's move from Youngtown to Sun City left some people with reservations about

**SEE MOVE, A5**



NICK COTE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jesse Ramirez, executive director of Valley View Community Food Bank, leads a tour of a new facility in Sun City during an open house Saturday.



Jesse Ramirez, executive director of the food bank, said nearly all the Sun Citizens he has spoken to about Valley View's new home have been supportive.

"We've had a lot of positive remarks, a lot of people stopping by to thank us," he said. "I haven't had anyone come in yet to let me have it."

Ramirez said he and his staff and volunteers have done their best to be good neighbors and the open house was a part of that.

"We wanted to invite people who have questions to come and learn what we're all about, what we do," he

said. "We want them to understand our commitment to Sun City."

Saturday's open house featured a farmers market, music and entertainment as well as barbecue, and Ramirez led tours of the food bank throughout the day. By showing residents what Valley View does Ramirez said he hoped to bring in a few new volunteers.

"It's a much bigger facility now, which means we have a lot of new programs," he said. "We want to let people in Sun City know they can volunteer with us during the day and we also want to encourage people in Peo-

ria, Glendale and Surprise to volunteer, too. We're open in the evenings, and we'd love to have some families come in and help us after supper."

Richard Stec used to volunteer at Valley View at its old location in Youngtown. He and his wife, Eleanor, came to the open house to see the new place for themselves.

"Valley View has been a great help to a lot of people," Eleanor Stec said. "We're very happy to have them here."

*Jeff Dempsey may be reached at 623-876-2531 or [jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com](mailto:jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com).*



# New Sun City location draws crowd at Valley View

**JEFF DEMPSEY**  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jack Taylor had no intention of visiting Valley View Community Food Bank in Sun City for Thanksgiving.

In fact, he had no idea there were any activities planned there.

"I was on my way to Fairway (Recreation Center)," the Sun City man said, "when I saw the young lady out on the corner with a sign. I suppose it was a spur of the moment thing."

Taylor was just one of hundreds who had their Thanksgiving meals at Valley View, a tradition that has grown every year.

John Maher, vice president of Valley View's board of directors, said about 300 people attended last year's Thanksgiving Day meal.

"We're thinking this year we'll probably double that," he said. "Personally, I'm hoping for a lot more than 600."



JAROD OPPERMAN/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Vanessa Sandoval and Savanna Garrison work on some arts and crafts during the Thanksgiving meal at the Valley View Community Food Bank in Sun City Thursday afternoon.

Maher said he believes having the event at Valley View's new location in Sun City will mean many more people attending than in previous years.

"One of many benefits of the new place is for activities like this one," he said.

Jesse Loredo, himself a board member, concurred with Maher.

"The people who regularly use our services

are here all the time, and they know exactly what we have planned," he said. "And they know exactly where to go. Now there is one place to go for everything."

An army of volunteers helped with things like seating guests and serving meals and, yes, standing near the street with signs letting passersby know about the free meal.

Jennifer Dennis



JAROD OPPERMAN/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Roseann Greco, right, of Peoria serves Jenean McCarty and her daughter, Kaitlin McCarty, of Phoenix during the Thanksgiving meal at Valley View Community Food Bank Thursday.

lives in Gilbert, but she made the drive to Valley View at 107th and Peoria avenues in Sun City so she could help out.

"I guess it was just maybe a tugging at the heart strings," she said. "I wanted to do something different this year, to give back. I have kids at home, but I made arrangements for them so I could do this."

Loredo said he was struck by just how many people chose to volunteer their time.

"I was so excited to see them," he said. "I had them all go around and share what they are thankful for and some people got pretty emotional. I just told them, we wouldn't be here and be able to do this if it wasn't for them. I said we are thankful for you."

As he finished with his meal, Taylor said he was glad he noticed the woman and her sign.

"I live alone, you see," he said. "And I'm not a good cook. Mostly, I survive on TV dinners. So this meal was very nice, and it's a really wonderful idea of theirs to do this."

Jeff Dempsey may be reached at 623-876-2531 or [jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com](mailto:jdempsey@yourwestvalley.com).





Retirees on golf carts collected donations door to door.

Continued from page 6

**Sun City, Ariz. | Retirees pause from poker to help**

Retirement isn't all about poker, bingo and lots of time to drink coffee and read the paper. Just ask the 400 fun-loving, big-hearted members of the Sundial Men's Club in Sun City.

For Make A Difference Day, the men, most of them in their 70s and 80s, aimed to hold the largest one-day food drive ever in a retirement community. As far as they know, they did, collecting 11½ tons of non-perishables — from 9,000 donors — for Valley View Community Food Bank. That's enough food to feed

657 families for a week.

"A lot of people here live Social Security check to Social Security check," says president Larry Carr, 73. "They depend on the food bank."

Details of the collection were provided to the media weeks before Make A Difference Day, and club members spread 6,000 pamphlets around the Phoenix suburb to notify residents.

Working four-hour shifts, volunteers manned collection bins at seven rec centers and eight golf courses. Donations began pouring in at 6 a.m. Meanwhile, Sundial men on golf carts went

door to door collecting from residents in their 90s and 100s who couldn't get out. Plus, more than

**Food bank is "blown away."**

\$3,000 in cash was collected, including \$300 at a friendly pool tournament. The next morning, a truck hauled 23,000 pounds of food to Valley View. "I was blown away," director Jesse Ramirez says. "I've been in food banks 27 years and never saw an effort that mighty!"

*\$10,000 award from Newman's Own goes to Valley View Community Food Bank*



# MERRY CHRISTMAS



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Wednesday,  
Dec. 25, 2013

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PROFILE

## Surprise volunteer opens food bank doors to all

By Tina Gamez  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Christmastime is considered a time of giving, and for Jesse Ramirez, the spirit of giving is a way of life.

When Ramirez founded Valley View Community Food Bank seven years ago, he did not want it to be a con-

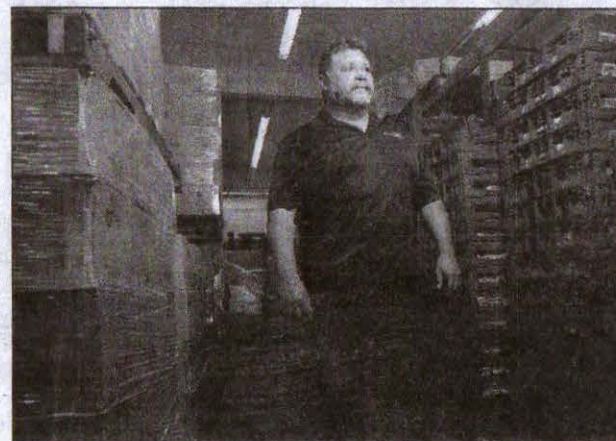
tinued career. "I wanted it to be a lifestyle, a way of giving back to the community as a volunteer."

Starting as a volunteer, Ramirez had a 22-year career with Westside Food Bank in Surprise, which sent him to the University of Colorado in Boulder to study non-

profit management and volunteer programs for the food bank.

At the end of his fourth summer at Boulder, Westside Food bank merged with St. Mary's Food Bank because the "Association of Arizona Food Banks talked to both

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Jesse Ramirez, pictured in the Valley View Community Food Bank, founded the Sun City-based food bank. [Nick Cote/Daily News-Sun]

V F S C Food Banks



# Food

» From page A1

food banks about merging because of the constant battle for getting product."

His department was let go, and Ramirez decided to start a "food shelf, using the skills" he had acquired over the years.

A Surprise resident, Ramirez, 52, felt the need to give back to the community for all the years of service and education the Westside food bank provided. "Plus, I just loved knowing that the community was being served in the old-fashioned Westside way," which was to give the food and be able to manage the donations for each and every family.

He didn't want another paid position. He said he felt a "calling" to serve and it "still feels like I just started yesterday, that's how great it is."

Valley View Community Food Bank in Sun City is now the third-largest food distributor as a food bank in the state of Arizona. It serves more than 350 people a day, five days a week.

"We're the only food bank that has a 24-hour service" for emergencies, Ramirez said. "We're also the only food bank in the state of Arizona

that doesn't have a withholding process just because you don't live in the area."

The food bank opens its doors to anybody who needs help, he said. "I always feel like wherever hope's doors open, it's going to be at Valley View." Ramirez added: "It's so important that non-profits throughout the state of Arizona start taking that action."

Two weeks ago, Ramirez said people who were turned away from other food banks because they lived outside their service area, came to Valley View for help. "It shouldn't be. Somebody comes knocking at your door and you can help, we should be able to help them, despite them being in Peoria or El Mirage."

None of the donations coming into Valley View go toward salaries, he said. "When people donate, they expect us to manage the food well and the monies that come in so that we can help anybody in need."

The part-time paid employees at Valley View, such as the professional semi-truck drivers, cleaning personnel and a few others, are paid through another program Ramirez started called Feeding Arizona. The

program works by getting independent food banks and food programs to work together so they can have farmers markets to raise money, not through Valley View, but through Feeding Arizona.

They also raise funds through a thrift store to pay rent and to pay utilities and buy food in bulk. They purchase semi-loads of pasta, rice, beans and recently bought five semi-loads of Top Ramen Noodles. "That stuff lasts and it fills tummies. We can make that a staple for the food bank," he said. "Feeding Arizona does that."

Through Feeding Arizona, there is a farmers market twice a week to supply more produce to the community for a \$10 donation.

Ramirez said the organization wants to make sure the produce goes to the homes that are in need and "people feel good about being able to pay a little bit or donate a little bit for the cause of food banking all the way around."

A musician since age 16, he supplements his income by playing music on the weekends; contracting through churches and studios. He is a member of the

West Valley Pops Band, the Sun City Winds Band and other groups.

Ramirez spends approximately 60 hours a week volunteering at the food bank. "That's putting it mildly," he said.

He doesn't complain about the hours at Valley View Community Food Bank. "I wanted to make this my life goal, to be able to help anybody that I could through the food bank program."

Ramirez added: "I want people to know that when they're in need, please come see us because we're the professionals, we know how to help out people, and we never turn anybody away."

The Valley View Community Food Bank is at 10615 W. Peoria Ave., Sun City.



## Food bank evolution

### Steady growth brings consistent changes

**By Rusty Bradshaw**  
Independent Newspapers

The Valley View Community Food Bank is taking another step in its evolution, and there will be more to come.

The 7-year-old entity added an auxiliary this year and officials expect it will help streamline the operation and provide more formality. The auxiliary will have a dual function, fundraising and personnel coordination. It will be overseen by Robin Saunders on a volunteer basis.

"Valley View's strength now is in establishing this auxiliary instead of all those things falling on the board and the director," said Sun City resident David Erickson, a member of the food bank's board.

With no full-time paid managers, Valley View has been directed by the volunteer board and founder Jesse Ramirez, the board president. Mr. Ramirez, who worked 27 years for Westside Food Bank, seven as volunteer coordinator, acts as de-facto general manager, but takes no pay from Valley View for the work. The load has been such, especially on Mr. Ramirez, that he has not spent Thanksgiving or Christmas with his family.

"This year, his wife said he had to be at home," Jesse Loredo, another food bank board member, only half jokingly offered.

When Westside merged with St. Mary's Food Bank and his department was eliminated, Mr. Ramirez wanted to continue to serve those in need.

The auxiliary is already making a difference as food bank officials have planned out activities through the rest of this year and are beginning to formulate plans for the coming year, according to Mr. Ramirez. The auxiliary will also provide some formality and more fiscal accountability, Mr. Ramirez said. Ms. Saunders plans to conduct internal audits of the food bank's



Independent Newspapers/Rusty Bradshaw  
Valley View Community Food Bank board members, from left, Jesse Loredo, Sylvia Byars, David Erickson and food bank director Jesse Ramirez with more than \$2,000 worth of eggs gained following a truck crash. Food bank volunteers, in background, sort and wash the intact eggs.

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VF SC Food Banks



## Food

Continued From Page 1

finances and operations.

"And this won't be to our own standards, it will be to standard auditing standards," he said.

Mr. Loredo, a Surprise resident, said Ms. Saunders has already restricted volunteers and others from wearing flip flops in the warehouse.

"She's got an eye on safety," he said.

The increased formality will be a welcome change for one board member. Mr. Erickson said Valley View operates under a different paradigm than he was used to and it has taken some adjustment over the years. A 25-year computer business owner in Minnesota, Mr. Erickson was used to more formal business practices.

"As a numbers kind of guy, I'm more comfortable with the formal practices," he said.

Mr. Ramirez, who has focused more on helping those in need rather than the practical side of the operation, understands that change is inevitable as Valley View grows.

"As we have grown, we now need to evolve," he said. "Now we need to be out there (in the communities) more."

In its early years, Valley View focused on the needs much closer to its Youngtown roots, limiting distribution to those in the Youngtown, Sun City, El Mirage and eastern Surprise areas.

"We wanted to take small steps, rather than a lot of them that would be overwhelming," Mr. Ramirez said.

But the distributions grew in scope as more people were turned away at the smaller food banks that were more neighborhood-focused, according to Mr. Ramirez. That change coincided with the move from Youngtown to the much larger former grocery outlet at 10615 W. Peoria Ave., Sun City. Now Valley View distributes food boxes to anyone in the Valley.

"We don't turn anyone away who is in need," Mr. Ramirez said.

Clients are able to get one food box per month. However, a new program, conducted every Thursday, allows seniors 65 and older or disabled to get an extra food box.

Valley View also serves more than 70 additional clients per day through an arrangement with Radiant Church, 15522 W. Paradise Lane, in Surprise for people in need in that area.

Always busy during distributions, Valley View, open five days per week, now sees more than 300 clients per day, according to Mr. Loredo. More than one-third of those clients live in Sun City.

"We are getting close to 40 percent of our clients being from Sun City," Mr. Ramirez explained.

Valley View is keeping up with demand, but it is sometimes a struggle, according to Mr. Erickson. Because cash donations were down during the summer, the agency was not able to buy meat. However, officials are creative in finding food sources.

A recent truck crash offered up a load of eggs. The eggs were refused by St. Mary's because they were damaged, according to Mr. Ramirez.

"I offered to take them and pay the driver's expenses here and back, which was about \$200," he explained.

Volunteers last week were sorting out and cleaning about \$2,000 worth of eggs for distribution.

The food bank has been governed by a volunteer board of directors from its inception. Mr. Ramirez chose board members for what they could bring to the organization, and because their philosophy on helping others was similar to his own. But the board was diverse in its background, and over the years has included more people with business and volunteer board experience. Mr. Loredo worked 37 years with Shamrock Foods and El Mirage resident Sylvia Byars, a U.S. Army veteran worked with day care centers. She is also USDA certified.

"We just got an attorney on our board also," Mr. Erickson said.

Valley View Community Food Bank is funded entirely through donations, its thrift store and weekly farmers market.

"If we went for government grants, we wouldn't be able to serve some of the people we do," Mr. Ramirez said.

Community donations fund the general operations of the food bank, in addition to some food purchases. Funds generated by the thrift store pay for electricity, rent and

See **Food** — Page 24



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September 17, 2014

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## Food

Continued From Page 21

some bulk food purchases. The farmers market pays for fuel, the salaries of 10 part-time employees and insurance. Originally, the part-timers were paid through the government stimulus program, but when that program ended Feeding Arizona funded them for one year, according to Mr. Ramirez.

"These paid positions are for things that cannot be done by volunteers, like truck drivers, warehouse workers and office managers," Mr. Erickson explained.

Valley View will begin its third "Scare Away Hunger" food drive Oct. 1. The drive involves placing boxes in businesses for residents to leave nonperishable foods. Last year the campaign had 55 boxes in businesses, including some as far away as Scottsdale.

"We are reaching out all over," Mr. Ramirez said.

Another change for the agency is how it hauls the food it receives. Valley View used to have semi-trailer rigs for that purpose, but maintenance on them became cost prohibitive, according to Mr. Ramirez. There was also some vandalism and damage that increased costs, Mr. Erickson added. Now food is hauled using personal vehicles and some smaller trailers, one of which was donated, Mr. Loreda explained.

*News Editor Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or rbradshaw@newszap.com.*

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A6 THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2013 | Daily News-Sun | www.yourwestvalley.com

## FOOD DRIVE

# Food bank hauls in quarter-million pounds

By Mitchell Vantrese  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Valley View Community Food Bank volunteers are sorting through 244,167 pounds of donations this week as a result of Saturday's Letter Carriers "Stamp Out Hunger" drive.

The donation is the largest amount given to the Sun City food bank since it has been involved with the local effort.

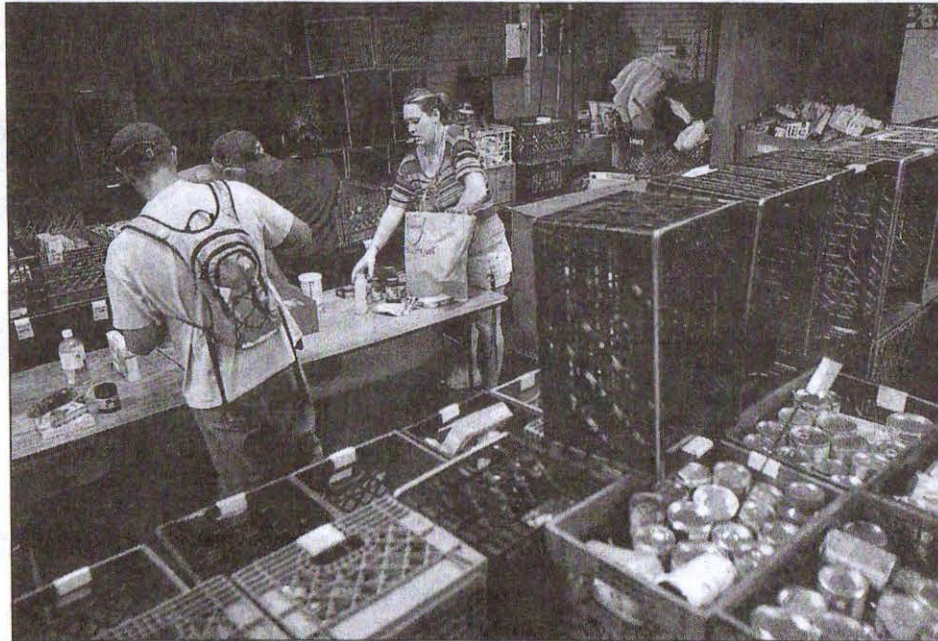
Jesse Ramirez, executive director of Valley View, said last year, the organization received more than a 140,000 pounds from the drive.

Ramirez said food donations had been slow prior to the weekend event.

"It's incredible what we've gotten this time around," he said. "This will definitely last for the next five or six weeks."

On Saturday, the local mail carriers participated in the national "Stamp Out Hunger" drive, collecting food from homes while they delivered mail.

All of the food goes to lo-



Volunteers at Valley View Community Food Bank sort boxes of food from the National Association of Letter Carriers' 21st annual "Stamp Out Hunger" drive Wednesday afternoon, which brought in over 200,000 pounds of food. [Jarod Opperman/Daily News-Sun]

cal food banks and pantries, in this instance Valley View along with facilities in Williams and Cottonwood.

Phillip Chakos, vice president of the Letter Carriers Road Runner branch in Sun City, said this year's lo-

cal food drive was the most successful.

He attributed the success to the paper bags donated by AARP, a national sponsor for "Stamp Out Hunger," instead of the normal plastic bags.

"People here in the West Valley really stepped up to the plate and filled those bags up to the brim," Chakos said.

And Chakos said he hopes postal workers can continue the food drive, which is tradi-



Boxes of food from the National Association of Letter Carriers' 21st annual "Stamp Out Hunger" drive fill Valley View Community Food Bank Wednesday afternoon. [Jarod Opperman/Daily News-Sun]

tionally conducted on Saturdays. But with the possibility of U.S. mail not being delivered on Saturday, he's uncertain about the future of the food drive.

"Saturday delivery is important, so we can keep this food drive alive and feed those who really need it in our community," Chakos said.

Jesse Loredo, a director on the Valley View board, said he appreciates the food

drive and the progress the food bank has made in the last two months.

Along with the large donation, Valley View was recently awarded \$10,000 from the national Make a Difference Day because of Sundial Men's Club's food drive efforts.

"It's absolutely remarkable that in just a short amount of time that we've been in our new location the things we've accomplished," Loredo said.





Volunteers from Radiant Church organize Gatorade Saturday morning at Valley View Community Food Bank. The church brought in more than 400 volunteers. [Jarod Opperman/Daily News-Sun]

## Hundreds help food bank in Sun City

By Tina Gamez  
DAILY NEWS-SUN

More than 400 volunteers descended on the Valley View Community Food Bank Saturday to help sort, pack and take inventory.

Jesse Ramirez, president of the food bank, put out an all-points-bulletin for help from organizations and area churches.

Radiant Church in Surprise replied forcefully with an army of volunteers.

"Radiant Church has been really, really great and they do awesome work in Surprise and all over, so they decided to come over here and help us out," Ramirez said.

The work that needed to get done at the food bank included: bagging water and Gatorade so it's ready for the homeless in the summer; sort produce to make sure it's safe for consumption, inventory the canned products that are given through their emergen-

cy food box program, help with the farmers market and the care club programs.

The inventory helps determine how many people can be helped immediately. The community can then be notified on the needs for the food bank so they can help out during the Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive on May 11.

There will be a food drop-off site at the food bank that day, and trucks will be dis-

patched to post offices in Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise with teams of volunteers to collect the donated food.

Because of the volume of clients served by Valley View, the food bank will collect and distribute items collected during the May 11 drive.

"We actually serve more people out of this community food bank, than any food bank around," Ramirez said.

» See Help on page A5



## Help

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"We serve almost 375 people a day," and "the need is great."

He said the major food bank in Phoenix serves 280 a day.

"I was real surprised, being in this industry for 27 years, the height of people who have been retired for 10, 15, 20 years, that the need for them is greater than I've ever seen in my career in the food bank industry," Ramirez said. Before 2007, 7 percent of the food bank clients lived in Sun City, and in 2013, 42 percent live in Sun City.

Ramirez attributes the increase in activity to the location of the food bank. "People coming in saying, 'How can I qualify for this? I've never been through this process before, but I don't have any food.'"

The food bank is encouraging families and young people to spend the summer volunteering to help feed those in

need. The summertime need is greater because children are out of school and many families depend on the school system to feed the children breakfast and lunch. "They don't have the money to provide for more meals in their home like when the kids go off to school," he said.

The volunteers got a bit of entertainment from the West Valley Pops Band, which rehearses at the food bank on Saturdays.

Radiant Church volunteer 16-year-old Nick Poplawski of Surprise said, "It's amazing. Anytime you get a chance to serve God, it's amazing."

Also with the church, Surprise resident Norbert Rodriguez, 11, who was there with his mom and sister, said, "I love it, it's a lot of fun to help. I feel good doing it."

For more information on the Valley View Community Food Bank at 10615 W. Peoria Ave, Sun City, call 623-933-3358 or visit <http://valleyviewfoodbank.wordpress.com/>.

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Independent Newspapers/Rusty Bradshaw

Jesse Ramirez, Valley View Community Food Bank director, sorts some food donated to the agency. Valley View will be moving its main warehouse to a new location in El Mirage at the beginning of December.

## Valley View food bank on the move

Sun City location secured for community distribution

By Rusty Bradshaw  
Independent Newspapers

Valley View Community Food Bank's main warehouse and distribution center will be in a new location by the first week in December.

The agency will move to 12321 NW Grand Ave., in the Coury Shopping Center in El Mirage. The 10,000-square-foot space is right next to Food City, according to Jesse Ramirez, Valley View Community Food

Bank director.

"The owners of the Coury Shopping Center really gave us a good deal on the rent," Mr. Ramirez said. "We're paying less than half of what we were at the Sun City location."

While the new location is not in Sun City, food bank officials will retain a presence in the community for food distribution.

"My heart goes out to these people," Mr. Ramirez said. "They (Sun City food bank clients) are really struggling and they are not getting a (Social Security) raise this year."

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Independent Newspapers  
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•Email: rbradshaw@newszap.com

Mr. Ramirez convinced the food bank's board to rent a space in the Sun City Professional Plaza, 12630 N. 103rd Ave., Suite 142. This location will be for Sun City food distribution only.

"Two donors really made this happen with \$400 monthly contributions that make our cost only \$300," Mr. Ramirez said.

Valley View will also continue its food distributions in Youngtown, 12030 N. Clubhouse Square, every Friday and at Radiant Church, 15522 W. Paradise Lane, in Surprise.

Making the move is the caper for a tough year for Valley View, which fell behind on rent at the Sun City location on the southeast corner of Peoria and 107th avenues. The agency was able to catch up after making a social media plea for donations, according to Marge Clark, a Valley View board member.

"Arizona Partners and APS both worked with us through those tough months," said Randolph Wolfson, another Valley View board member. "This was the first time Valley View has ever been late with rent."

The tough year put a strain on Valley View finances the agency has not experienced before.

"We had exhausted our savings by June, and July and August are our slowest months for revenue and food donations," he said. "In all the years I have been doing this, this was the first time I was really afraid we might not make it."

While Arizona Partners, property managers for the current Valley View location, 10615 W. Peoria Ave., did not return Independent's calls to confirm, Mr. Ramirez said Jan and Dean's will be the new occupants of the building.

The new Valley View space in El Mirage is 10,000 square feet, about half the size of the Sun City location.

"It will be tough and tight, but we will make it work," Mr. Ramirez said.

The food bank will continue to provide space for Saturday rehearsals of the West Valley Pops Band.

"It will mean a lot of work setting up Fridays, but we will make it happen," Mr. Ramirez said. "That is something I wanted to keep intact."

Mr. Ramirez is a musician himself and plays various gigs throughout the Valley to support his family. He does not receive a salary for his efforts at Valley View, providing his services as a volunteer.

The financial picture continues to be tight for Valley View, but officials are working to make the move as cost effective as possible. Sun City resident Doug Proudlock is leading an effort to find remodeling services, ongoing supplies and other continuing costs at discounted rates.

"It's something that must be done," he said. "I am finding that people are willing to help."

Mr. Ramirez said most of the remodeling is complete at the new location, and was done at a fraction of the cost of quotes received.

Valley View officials expect to be completely out of the Sun City facility by Friday, Dec. 4, but Mr. Ramirez said operations at the El Mirage facility will begin Tuesday, Dec. 1. The Valley View thrift store will continue to operate, but out of an as yet to be determined location in Sun City West.

"We will be kind of spread out, but it will pay off in the long run," Mr. Ramirez said. "The savings we will have in rent, we can use for food programs."

The thrift store will be closed at the end of November and is expected to reopen in mid-December. Mr. Ramirez said Valley View could use some additional volunteer help during the transition.

Call 623-297-9102.

In addition to the surge of donations following the social media plea, Valley View is getting help from other areas, including some from outside the Northwest Valley. The Town of Paradise Valley Police Department is planning a "stuff the cruiser" food drive and has challenged the Phoenix police to do the same, according to Mr. Ramirez. Ms. Clark also said a Halloween scramble golf tournament was planned by the Sun City Country Club as a fundraiser and Mutual of Omaha Bank in Sun City West hosted a fund drive in early November.

"There is also an Eagle Scout in Surprise who is doing a food drive as part of his community service project," Ms. Clark said.

Peyton Thalman hosted the drive Halloween night at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, 14878 Sierra Montana Loop, Surprise.

The West Valley Pops Band also conducts food drives at its concerts. The band has 11 shows on the scheduled for the coming year.

"They brought in about 15,000 pounds of food last year," Mr. Ramirez said.

In addition to these efforts, Ms. Clark is beginning to make grant requests. The Valley View board is also in the planning stages of a capital improvement campaign designed to raise about \$2 million to construct a new warehouse on a piece of industrial property that was donated to the agency, according to Mr. Ramirez.

"A new building, only about 15 minutes from our Sun City location, will give us more storage space and increase other opportunities for food donations," he said.

Mr. Ramirez said Valley View clientele continue to be above 30 percent senior citizens and about 20 percent children. The agency serves about 400 clients per day at the Sun City locations, about 200 daily at twice weekly distributions at Radiant Church in Surprise and about 30 per day in once weekly distributions in Youngtown.

Valley View is also qualified as a state tax credit agency.



# Community News

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**your news tips**

Got a tip? Contact News Editor  
Rusty Bradshaw at  
rbradshaw@newszap.com

## Valley View makes Sun City switch

**By Rusty Bradshaw**  
Independent Newspapers

**V**alley View Community Food Bank will have a new location in Sun City to distribute food to residents in need.

The agency had planned to have a Sun City presence in the Sun City Professional Building, 12630 N. 103rd Ave. But a lease for that location fell through, according to Jesse Ramirez, Valley View Community Food Bank director.

"This really worked out for the best," he said.

Food bank officials are now renting a space on the First United Methodist Church campus, 9849 N. 105th Ave., for Sun City food distribution. The new location is just a few blocks from the food bank's former distribution center, 10615 W. Peoria Ave.

Valley View was forced to vacate that location when lease payments were increased by the property owners and an-

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Independent Newspapers/Rusty Bradshaw  
**Valley View Community Food Bank volunteers Jeannette Downing, left, and Ann Ferguson stock shelves at the food bank's new Sun City distribution site at the First United Methodist Church, 9849 N. 105th Ave.**

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# Switch

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other business, Jan and Dean's, made a deal to move into the building. Valley View moved to 12321 NW Grand Ave., in the Coury Shopping Center in El Mirage. The 10,000-square-foot space is next to Food City, according to Mr. Ramirez. Valley View began working out of both new locations Dec. 1, he added.

"We are still moving some things, but so far it is working out great," Mr. Ramirez said.

Maintaining a Sun City distribution point was important to Mr. Ramirez and the Valley View Board of Directors.

"My heart goes out to these people," Mr. Ramirez said. "They (Sun City food bank clients) are really struggling and they are not getting a (Social Security) raise this year."

Valley View will also continue its food distributions in Youngtown, 12030 N. Clubhouse Square, every Friday and at Radiant Church, 15522 W. Paradise Lane, in Surprise. The Valley View thrift store will continue to operate, but out of an as yet determined location in Sun City West.

Mr. Ramirez said Valley View could use some additional volunteer help during the transition.

Call 623-297-9102.

Making the move is the caper for a tough year for Valley View, which fell be-

hind on rent at the Sun City location on the southeast corner of Peoria and 107th avenues. The agency was able to catch up after making a social media plea for donations, according to Marge Clark, a Valley View board member.

"Arizona Partners and APS both worked with us through those tough months," said Randolph Wolfson, another Valley View board member. "This was the first time Valley View has ever been late with rent."

Rising demand for food and declining donations, both monetary and of food, forced Valley View officials to dip into their reserves.

"We had exhausted our savings by June, and July and August are our slowest months for revenue and food donations," Mr. Ramirez said. "In all the years I have been doing this, this was the first time I was really afraid we might not make it."

The new Valley View space in El Mirage is 10,000 square feet, about half the size at the Sun City location.

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ANNIVERSARY



Jesse Ramirez, right, Valley View Community Food Bank director, and board members Mary Maclin, center, and Marge Clark look over items in the agency's thrift store. [Rusty Bradshaw/Independent Newsmedia]

# Marking a milestone

## Food bank reaches 10 years

By Rusty Bradshaw  
 INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Valley View Community Food Bank has seen many changes in its first decade of operation, and there may be more in store for the future.

The food bank was established by Jesse Ramirez, a former West Side Food Bank employee, in 2007 to help fill gaps for food demand. The first food bank was on Nevada Avenue in Youngtown and opened its doors in March of that year, according to Marge Clark, Valley View Community Food Bank board member.

"Other food banks had boundary and other re-

**WHERE TO GO:**

**Warehouse/distribution**  
 12321 N.W. Grand Ave., El Mirage  
 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 7-10 a.m. Thursdays for senior citizens  
 15522 W. Paradise Lane, Surprise  
 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday  
 9849 N. 105th Ave., Sun City  
 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Thursday  
 12030 Clubhouse Square, Youngtown  
 7 a.m.-noon Friday

**Farmers market**

12321 N.W. Grand Ave., El Mirage  
 5:30-11 a.m. Saturday

**Thrift shops**

12321 N.W. Grand Ave., El Mirage  
 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Saturday  
 13576 Camino del Sol, Sun City West  
 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Saturday  
 15462 N. 99th Ave., Sun City  
 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Saturday

strictions that left some people who needed food without their basic needs," Mr. Ramirez said. "We are

here to fill those gaps."

From those humble beginnings, Valley View grew to multiple sites, and food bank officials are looking for additional expansion. They are working to open a facility in Glendale and returning to Sun City. In the meantime, officials are celebrating the facilities first 10 years.

A gala fundraiser was conducted Oct. 28 that drew more than 100 paying guests and countless others that could not attend but donated anyway, according to Mary Maclin, a Valley View board member. While Valley View officials operate two fundraisers per year, the Oct. 28 event was much larger due to the milestone.

"We are happy to have made it 10 years," Mr. Ramirez said. "We plan to keep our doors open to give people hope in the West Valley."

**Glendale facility**

Valley View officials are waiting for permit approval from city of Glendale officials to open a warehouse and distribution center in the city.

It would be the food bank's seventh facility in four West Valley communities.

The Coucy Brothers, landlords of the El Mirage food bank location, in 2016 offered Valley View officials a Glendale site large enough for a thrift store, food pantry and much

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VFSC Food Banks



## Food

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"Space has been a problem since we left the Peoria Avenue location," Ms. Clark said.

She added Valley View officials received 300,000 pounds of food in May through the postal carriers drive and scrambled to store it.

### Long-term plan

Valley View officials hope to eventually build a new central warehouse. This would help ease the storage woes, but save money as well.

"The move from Sun City was a necessity, but we were grateful to get the space in El Mirage because that kept us close to Grand Avenue for easy access to our oth-

er locations," he said.

When a warehouse is built, it will remain near Grand Avenue.

"We have 1.5 acres in El Mirage that is paid for," Ms. Clark explained. "The land was donated to Valley View."

Mr. Ramirez said when a warehouse is built, officials will keep the El Mirage facility as a distribution center and thrift store at least until the end of the lease contract, about 3.5 years.

"If we're not paying rent on a warehouse, we could use those funds for more food and programs," Mr. Ramirez said.

Ms. Clark added without the expense of warehouse rent, Valley View officials could have smaller distribution centers.

### Demand

Mr. Ramirez said demand from clients continue to grow.

While numbers have decreased some in Sun City, traditionally about 35 percent of Valley View's clients have come from that community. Mr. Ramirez said there was about a 20 percent increase in demand after making the move to El Mirage.

"We are serving about 360 people per day at the El Mirage location," he added.

At the food bank's distribution facility at Radiant Church in Surprise, clients come from Surprise, Wittmann and Wickenburg, according to Mr. Ramirez.

The Youngtown location, with space provided by the town for a once weekly dis-

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## Food

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needed storage space at a reasonable rent, according to Ms. Clark. While they have not been able to open a facility there yet, the land owners extended Valley View's availability to the site at 5421 W. Glendale Ave. pending city approvals, according to Mr. Ramirez.

"We are hoping to be able to open in December, but that all depends on the city," Mr. Ramirez said.

### Back to Sun City

Valley View is eyeing a return to Sun City, where it had its main warehouse and distribution center for several years.

"We are seeing less clients in Sun City, but I think that is because the distribution center is kind of out of the way," Mr. Ramirez said. "We want a spot that has easier access."

The Sun City distribution facility is in rooms at the First United Methodist Church, 9849 N. 105th Ave.

Officials of a large thrift store in the Sun Bowl Plaza on the southwest corner of 107th and Peoria avenues are planning a move across the street to the former Safeway store on the southeast corner of the intersection, Valley View's former Sun City location, and Valley View officials are researching occupation of the Sun Bowl Plaza location, according to Mr. Ramirez.

The larger Sun City location would also give Valley View officials more storage space.

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## Food

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tribution, is also seeing a rise in demand.

"There are a lot of young families and seniors there," Ms. Clark said.

Youngtown is the only location where food must be trucked in for each distribution, Mr. Ramirez added.

### Operation

Valley View Community Food Bank is operated almost entirely by volunteers and funded by food and monetary donations.

All Valley View thrift stores are staffed by volunteers, according to Mr. Ramirez. There are seven paid part-time positions, including two drivers, two front desk workers,

one volunteer coordinator and one fork lift operator and one warehouse maintenance worker, he added. Mr. Ramirez does not receive a salary as food bank director, according to Ms. Clark.

"We still have volunteer groups — service clubs, churches and others — that come in to help in the warehouse and distribution centers," Mr. Ramirez explained. "Our donors and volunteers are the only way we could make this happen."

Ms. Clark said some Eagle Scouts have conducted food drives as part of their required community service projects. Clients also provide some volunteer help.

"That is their way of giving something back to Valley View," Ms. Clark said.

Originally, clients were allowed to come every two weeks for food. When demand grew and donations decreased during the economic downturn, client visits were limited to once per month.

Ms. Maclin also said food boxes are customized for clients' needs.

"Sometimes we have specific requests from clients to satisfy dietary requirements," Ms. Maclin said.

That means some food offered to clients is refused in favor of something else. "If they don't want it, we can give it to someone else," she added.

Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or rbradshaw@newszap.com.