

Crisis Food Center begins 40th year of service

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Crisis Food Center has been serving the **Riverbend** area for 40 years - it started as a one-woman operation from a home in 1977.

That home belonged to **Frances Jackson**, who fed the poor from her own doors until her pastor got wind of her doings. The pantry was then assumed by **Elm Street Presbyterian Church**. Current Daily Director of Crisis Food Center, **Nick Kessinger**,

said Elm Street Presbyterian Church purchased the center's current building of operations for \$1 from a nearby Methodist church some time in the 1980s. The building once served as the parsonage, or pastor's dwelling place, for the church.

Since then, the nearby Methodist church has changed hands and denominations, currently being occupied by **Missionary Baptist Church's** congregation, but the Crisis Food Center has remained relatively the same. It houses the same basic mission - to feed the poor and hungry across the area - but has a few additions, such as an increased storage area built in 2004.

Kessinger said today's operations work to serve as many as 450 families a month with a seven-day, 30-pound box of food. A few exercises in simple math results in Crisis Food Center giving an estimated 162,000 pounds (81 tons) of food a year.

"That number always changes," Kessinger said. "We feed about 450 families a month, but that number goes up and down based on time of year."

Donations of food is a huge part of what the Crisis Food Center does, Kessinger said. Large donations, such as four pallets of food (estimated at a worth of \$10,000) from local law firm owner **John Simmons** and a massive food drive resulting in 1,600 pounds of food orchestrated by **Alton Refrigeration** owner **Bill Crane**, are massive boosts to the operation, but financial donations are also required.

"We have staple items, items which we will always have," Kessinger said. "Whatever we don't get donated, we go out and purchase."

Those staple items include: mashed potatoes, soup, canned vegetables, cereal, milk and macaroni and cheese. Meat is also included in the food packages, but it varies based on the time of the year.

"We currently have ground turkey for spaghetti and chili," Kessinger said. "We get stuff in for tacos, sometimes, so we get more taco shells and do tacos. We are also giving out chicken breasts and chicken legs."

Local businesses provide a great amount of assistance to the Crisis Food Center. Kessinger said that assistance, coupled with some cost-cutting measures, have allowed the center to provide each of the families it serves with a seven day supply of food. It was formerly only able to provide families with five days worth of food once each month.

Area grocery stores and supermarkets have assisted the center as well. Kessinger said most of the local stores call the center when needed items go on sale and offer the center

discounts on its purchases. Kessinger said the center purchases items from each area store and maintains great relationships with all of them.

If any Riverbend resident is in need of food, the Crisis Food Center can be reached at (618) 462-8201 on mornings between 8:30-11 a.m. It is located at 21 E Sixth St. Kessinger said anyone applying for food packages should be ready to provide proof of address.

"They only have to call," he said. "We do have to see a proof of address. It keeps everything straight and fair about it."

Kessinger also said he and the board of the Crisis Food Center are planning events to celebrate the 40th anniversary for later in the year.