

Be Concerned



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Year unlike any other ends with record Christmas Store

Big, crazy and much appreciated.

That was 2020 at Be Concerned.

And it also described

the last program of the year, the 2020 Christmas Store.

Over the course of 23 days that ended just before Christmas Eve, the Store helped nearly 2,000 families with food, hygiene products, cleaning supplies and toys.

That included 425 families from the New Hope Center, a Newport Church that picks up food each Friday at Be Concerned left over from



Stuff the Bus lived up to its name in 2020. Remke Manager Mark Ash, left, and Andy Brunzman show food that shoppers donated.

the week.

“We said at the start of the Store we’d help as many people as we could as long as we had food left,” said Be Concerned Executive Director Andy Brunzman.

Dozens of drives helped ensure that there was more than enough food for all who turned out.

Churches, schools, businesses and individuals all pitched in

on the drives.

Many were long-standing. St. Elizabeth Physicians collected food at all 37 of its Kenton County offices for the 10th straight year.

TANK partnered with Remke again to reprise Stuff the Bus at the grocer’s Crescent Springs location.

The Christmas Store’s 2020 number broke Be Concerned’s service record for a **Continued on Page 4**



Megan Rinaldi and her daughter, Giuliana, stock toys that Megan’s Mom, Bonnie Moore, (rear) bought with donations from a family drive for the Christmas Store.

Many Santas load toy shelves

The 2020 Christmas Store, said Be Concerned Executive Director Andy Brunzman, “was all about the kids.”

And an outpouring of toys from organizations ranging from the Kings Hammer Soccer Club to the Sisters of Divine Providence made sure there was plenty for children under the tree on Christmas morning.

The Store distributed more than 2,500 toys to approximately 750 children, from newborns to teens. They came from families participating in Be Concerned’s free pantries in Covington and Erlanger, the agency’s new ESL Night program for Hispanic-Latinos, and a supplemental outreach for households unable to get help

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Latest weapon in virus war: Covid Boxes

From the pandemic’s start last Spring, health experts hammered away at the same themes to stave off infection:

- Wear masks.
- Disinfect surfaces frequently.
- Wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands.

Covington residents’ compliance with that advice got a huge boost through a project called Co³ (Combatting Covid in Covington) that has played out over the past four months.

With a \$60,600 grant funded by the

City of Covington from federal CARES Act money, Be Concerned bought cleaning supplies and PPE -- disinfectant spray and wipes, hand soap and sanitizer; masks and paper products -- and boxes to hold them.

Distribution of the cartons, dubbed “Covid Boxes,” started in November. By mid-February, only 19 of the 2,000 boxes originally available were left.

Since the grant for the project came through the city, only Covington

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BB&T Bank employees took advantage of a balmy late-fall day in November to social distance and assemble COVID Boxes on the Be Concerned parking lot. The agency, partnering with the city of Covington, has distributed almost 2,000 boxes since November.

New ESL Night rolls out the welcome mat for Hispanic-Latino shoppers

The Hispanic-Latino population in Northern Kentucky has typically been under-counted, say some community leaders. Many folks in that group are wary of Census takers or other government representatives, and very reluctant to call attention to themselves.

Those same feelings also keep Hispanic-Latinos who are food-insecure from seeking help.

A new program started by Be Concerned in November seeks to address and improve on that reality.

ESL (English as a Second Language) Night is an extraordinary monthly session of Be Concerned's Covington pantry reserved exclusively for Hispanic-Latinos.

Partnering in the project with Be Concerned is the Esperanza Latino Center, a two-year-old nonprofit in Covington.

Esperanza initially publicized ESL Night

through a text-messaging system that connects it to the 300+ families it serves regularly.

The Center now schedules families for ESL Night appointments and takes their food orders, which it passes on to Be Concerned.

Esperanza staff and volunteers also translate as needed through each ESL Night session.

That's a major incentive for Hispanic-Latinos to try Be Concerned's pantry, said Esperanza Director Reid Yearwood.

Another is shopping with folks from their ethnic group --- "people like themselves," he said.

"We're trying to build their comfort level with coming to Be Concerned. We're trying to show them this is a place where they can get help and where they have nothing to fear."



A volunteer left, helps a shopper in the pantry in Covington during ESL Night's second session, in December.

The Hispanic-Latino shoppers in the program will receive staples that other pantry shoppers get -- meat, fresh produce, dairy products, eggs, canned and packaged goods.

But they'll also receive "culturally appropriate" food, said Be Concerned Executive Director Andy Brunsman. Included: Maseca (corn flour), Avena (oats), black and red beans, cooking oil, avocados, plantains, rice and tortillas. Yearwood said he expects that will help boost participation.

The first 3 ESL Nights brought a mix of nationalities to Be Concerned:

Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Puerto Ricans.

ESL Night can accommodate up to 72 families each session. Participation so far has been encouraging: 47 families in November, 62 in December and 58 in January.

Swelling December's attendance were the toys that were given to the 129 children whose families shopped that month, said Brunsman.

If ESL Night reaches capacity, Be Concerned will add a second session of the program each month. "If that fills up, we'll consider a week-end session," Brunsman said.

COVID Boxes help shoppers stave off virus

Continued from Page 1 residents were eligible for the boxes. But they didn't have to be participants in Be Concerned's food program.

The project reserved 20% of the boxes for the general public. They were handed out at Saturday outreach events in November, December and January.

Covington residents who shopped in Be Concerned's pantries or received Senior Food Deliveries automatically received the boxes.

Retail value of each box was \$30, but the value was far more.

"Some of this stuff was still hard to find even at the end of the year," said Be Concerned Executive Director Andy Brunsman.

"Fortunately, we were able to cover everything we needed from 3-4 sources who helped us find these same items last spring,"

New Riff Distillery in Newport donated three 55-gallon drums of the hand sanitizer it began making soon after the pandemic started.

Covington Mayor Joe Meyer said the city was quick to partner with Be Concerned because it accurately assessed city residents' needs and proposed an efficient plan to address them.

"Be Concerned cut through all the chatter," Meyer said, "and said with the city's help, they could act quickly in a targeted way to give our families the cleaning and hygiene items many of them were having a difficult time finding."

Pantry and thrift store swap spaces at Be Concerned's Erlanger location

Be Concerned's Erlanger pantry has found an upside to downstairs.

The pantry, located in the top level of the building dating back to its United Ministries' days, swapped space in January with the basement thrift store, which moved upstairs.

The change will more than double the pantry space, allowing for a better flow of traffic through the room once the pandemic is over and shoppers return there.

All food will now be received through an overhead door in a storage area that adjoins the pantry. That will accommodate entire pallets of food, which previously had to be unloaded by hand.

Volunteer Robert Lindeman stocks food in the relocated Erlanger pantry.



And in bad weather, shoppers can load food directly into their cars through that basement garage door.

"Ease of access was one of the main reasons for this change," said David Laake, Erlanger site director.

Said Executive Director Andy Brunsman: "It's just a much more efficient configuration. No more triple touching every item we get in."

Lynda Crossan named development director

Lynda Crossan helped make some Be Concerned history in 2018 when she orchestrated the first rebrand in the organization's 50+ years of operation. That pro bono effort by Black & White, a Louisville design firm she recruited, produced, among other things, a new logo (visible on the top of Page 1) and slogan: The People's Pantry.

In November, Lynda made history again when she became Be Concerned's first full-time development director.

(Be Concerned has had a part-time development director, Paul Gottbrath, since 2014. With Lynda's hiring, he is now grants director.)

Lynda, a Delaware native and an Ohio State graduate, lives in Union with her husband, Kirk Knotts, and their daughters, Ally & Karah.

She brings 3 decades of experience in finance and marketing to her new position. Most of her time was spent at Fidelity Investments in Covington.

To date she's split her days at Be Concerned between things that will fall within her purview and learning day-to-day operations. In the former category, she's surveyed shoppers, donors and volunteers; worked out kinks in the donor database, and set up holiday drives.

On the operational side, she's filled orders for emergency food, checked in

Oodles of toys thrill Store girls and boys

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anywhere else.

The Sisters of Divine Providence were a major toy contributor again through a connection the Melbourne community has with Hasbro. The Christmas Store has benefited for nearly 20 years.

Kings Hammer Soccer, helping for a 4th straight year, posted links to Amazon on its Facebook page, connecting donors to 2 Be Concerned wish lists. The club collected about 400 items.

Residents of The Views, Duveneck Square and Riverhaus Apartments also went high-tech, using a QR Code to order toys on Amazon and have them



Lynda Crossan

shoppers for their pantry appointments, and recruited new volunteers through an online process.

Lynda said seeing Be Concerned up close has only left her more impressed by the work the organization does.

She lauded Executive Director Andy Brunzman's "commitment to the mission. He wants to keep us moving forward. You see the immediate impact of what we do here. You see we're doing the right thing the right way."

Shoppers' stories, she said, have been inspiring. "They can't thank us enough."

Taking it all in leaves her with only one question. "When you reflect on our mission and our impact, how could you not want to be a part of it?" she said.



Shoppers mull gift options in the Toy Room in December.

shipped directly to Be Concerned.

"Donors really liked that way," said Brunzman. "The lesson: make it as simple as possible."

Prioritizing kids' gifts in the 2020 Store was an easy decision, he said. "COVID took so much from kids this past year. We didn't want it to take away the magic of Christmas, too."

Stone takes over in warehouse

Josh Stone says one of his passions is organizing. So far, Be Concerned's new Covington warehouse manager has had lots of chances to do that.

In less than 3 months on the job, he's devised a big-container system for items of the same kind, restructured the walk-in meat freezer, and culled older product from the inventory.

All while running pickup routes every day and keeping pantry shelves stocked.

Josh, an Erlanger native, comes to Be Concerned with 12 years' experience in warehousing. He said he takes pride in his work, as reflected in employee awards he's won.

Josh got a first-hand look at Be Concerned's



Josh Stone

robust donated food stream when he arrived in November.

He's found many other positives, including good volunteers and respect-based management.

"I feel very blessed that you all gave me a job here," he said. "This place feels like family."

Josh and his girlfriend, Amy Mahoney, recently bought a house in Florence.

SAVE THE DATE!
BE CONCERNED GOLF OUTING
Sept. 9-10, 2021

Some drives were child's play

The 2020 Christmas Store was all about the kids, but they were giving toys as well as receiving them.

A group of Blessed Sacrament students took to the streets in their neighborhoods -- Villa Hills/Crescent Springs, Oakbrook and Farmington -- in late November and left notice they'd return a week later to pick up toy donations. Residents' enthusiastic response filled 3 vans.

That drive model has been used before, but proved particularly fitting for a COVID era.

It precluded direct contact between the kids and donors. And it afforded kids cooped up in their own homes a chance to get outside.

"The kids had fun, got service hours for school and helped Be Concerned," said Shannon Kurtzner, who participated with her children, Drew, Adelaide and Nicky.



The People's Pantry

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Covington, KY 41011

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NAACP honors Be Concerned



The Northern Kentucky branch of the NAACP presented Be Concerned with its Dr. Martin L. King Jr. Corporate Award in January for outreach efforts to find people who need food and to serve them.

Executive Director Andy Brunzman accepted the award for Be Concerned.

In the presentation were Jerome Bowles, president of the Northern Kentucky branch, right; mistress of ceremonies Del Shawn Renee Hayes, center; and Victoria Washington, first VP for the branch

Bowles said Be Concerned was “doing the work of Dr. King” in its ongoing efforts to expand its food programs.

THANKS

Blessed Sacrament
The Butler Foundation
Covington Catholic High School
Covington Latin School
Crossroads Church
Cub Scout Pack 708
The Durr Foundation
Duvneck Square, The Views
& River Haus Apartments
Erlanger Police
Flottman Company
Fort Wright Police
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Johnson Family Foundation
Kenton Co. Parks & Golf Courses
Kings Hammer Soccer Club
Kroger
Mary Queen of Heaven
Mother of God Church
Payroll Partners
Remke Markets
St. Agnes Church
St. Elizabeth Physicians
St. Henry District High School
St. Pius X Church
TANK

Christmas Store biggest yet

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single month, surpassing the 1,520 families helped last March, when COVID exploded.

There were changes in the Store this year. In Covington, the program was confined to the top floor, a simpler and safer set-up.

Perhaps the change customers noticed most: no fees for participation. Brunzman said the fees are gone for good.

Customers took the changes in stride.

“People were very pleased we did what we did,” Brunzman said. “They were thankful we didn’t cancel the Store altogether.”

Blanton's Bourbon Raffle

March 15 -- April 15

Chances \$10 each
Only 1,500 tickets sold

Winner receives 8 bottles of
Blanton's with full set of cork horses
spelling out “Blanton's”

Drawing April 15, 3 PM
For tickets, beconcerned.org