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NYPIRG works to help less fortunate as Thanksgiving nears

By Ryan Gainor

Syracuse University and SUNY-ESF students have more on their minds this holiday season than Thanksgiving turkey. They have the meals of less fortunate people who cannot afford food on their minds as well.

Volunteers working with the New York Public Interest Research Group will be positioned outside of several Peter's Groceries Inc. locations and P&C Foods supermarkets Saturday to collect donations of food and toiletries, said Sean Vormwald, project coordinator for NYPIRG at SU and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

The food collected at the supermarkets will be distributed by the Central New York Food Bank and the toiletries will be distributed by the Salvation Army as part of a continuing effort to help the needy in the Syracuse area, Vormwald added.

"Thanksgiving is a holiday where people gorge themselves when some people don't have anything," he said.

Assad Rajani, the hunger and homeless outreach representative for NYPIRG at SU and ESF and a junior triple major in English, political science and history, said this weekend should be a successful time for the project because many people will be heading to the supermarkets to shop for Thanksgiving. As customers enter the store, student volunteers will hand them a flyer asking for canned or nonperishable food and toiletries.

Steve Gates, the general manager of the Nottingham Peter's location where students will collect food this Sunday, said many groups collect food for the less fortunate throughout the holiday season and are encouraged by Peter's.

"Anything that can be done to help the community with the economy down the way it is and people maybe not donating as much is a good thing," Gates said. "If you can catch people in a good mood as they enter the store to do their Thanksgiving shopping it is definitely beneficial."

The student volunteers are members of NYPIRG, members of the SU chapter Alpha Phi Omega, the national honor fraternity, and other student groups on campus, Rajani added.

Laura Bova, a development associate at the Central New York Food Bank, said there are an increased number of food drives during the holiday season every year but added the bank needs donations all year in order to perform its job.

"We are well-equipped to handle the demand for food but every little bit helps," she said.

The food bank provides food to about 550 programs in Central and Northern New York, including shelters and soup kitchens, and helps to serve approximately 30,000 meals every day.

Rajani said it is important for students to become actively involved in the community surrounding SU and for them to realize there are less fortunate people in the area.

"There is such a rift between this campus and the community, four blocks in any direction is thought of as no man's land," he said.

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