



## CHEST DONOR NEWSLETTER

2nd Quarter 2025

To our donors,

Thank you for your continued support. You make it possible to help many families in our community whose needs would otherwise go unaddressed.

It would help us if we could send these to your email address rather than by mail. If you are willing to share your email, write with permission to send communications to [mgrenier@frontiernet.net](mailto:mgrenier@frontiernet.net).

### THE NEED IN WEBSTER

Some Webster Community Chest programs—such as our Help Line, Women’s Empowerment, Aid to Organizations, and Shirley Miller Scholarships—benefit the whole community. Others help our lower-income families. You might be surprised to know that of the 17 Rochester suburbs; Webster has the third lowest average family income at \$66,584 (in 2023). Only Gates and Brockport are lower. This is because Webster has a larger low-income population in our several subsidized housing units. Phillips Village is the largest, with housing for 500 families. Webster also has many seniors who are also low income. Several of our programs assist food-insecure folks. A recent study ([www.commongroundhealth.org](http://www.commongroundhealth.org)) reports that 9% of the people in Monroe County suburban towns are food insecure (in addition to the distressing numbers in the City). We do not have numbers specifically for Webster but given our lower-than-average income, Webster may have higher than average food insecurity.

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### PHILLIPS VILLAGE “LITTLE PANTRY” REPORT

Currently ten of our volunteers run this program and make deliveries twice a week. In The first quarter of 2025, we delivered \$2,302 worth of groceries to the food pantry at Phillips Village. Around three-quarters of this came from volunteer donations and about one-quarter were items from our Meal Center inventory or were purchased with Chest funds.

Chris and Mark McAllister at McAllister Sign, Inc., 1194 Ridge Road in Webster, donated a sign in February for the pantry. They did all the design work

and manufactured it. The sign will encourage those who need help to contact the Benefits Counselors at Webster Community Chest and to contact our partner Webster HOPE. We are grateful to the McAllisters for their generous donation.



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### WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Based on client and donor survey results during our 2024 Strategic Planning, the Chest’s Benefits Counselors Tracy Dennis and Kris Lombardo designed a Women’s Empowerment Program. They saw a need for clients, who are at greater risk of isolation and/or abuse, to learn how to keep themselves safe and to socialize with other women. The Chest’s Board approved a trial program now up and running.



Master Jason Lee

Once a week, in partnership with the Webster Recreation Center, our Counselors provide opportunities for our clients and other women from Webster to be together. Every other week, in a one-hour class they learn Women’s Self-Defense with Kuk Sool Won instructor Master Jason Lee. Any woman who is interested can

enroll in the program at the Rec Center at \$20 for the spring session (an amazing bargain!). Jason donates much of his time and the Chest subsidizes clients' enrollments.



*Master Jason Lee "playing bad guy" with student*

On alternate weeks, our counselors host a program called CAFES (Creative Amazing Friendship, Empowerment & Support) where they provide snacks, crafts and plenty of time to chat and make connections. This is a FREE program as CAFES does not require registration at Webster Parks and Recreation. So far, the group has learned to make jewelry and cards, and they have written messages in those cards for the local Blue Star Mothers organization to collect and send to active soldiers with their next mailing. The group provides feedback after each session as well as suggestions for future gatherings.

We'd love to see you there!



*Some of the cards made and written at CAFES gatherings.*

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## THE WEBSTER COMMUNITY CHEST MEAL CENTER

Years ago, when the Webster Community Chest had office and storage space in a former school building on Ebner Road, there was a weekly food distribution for the Chest's clients similar to that currently run by Webster HOPE. The program

moved to a building on the Town Hall campus for a while, but the town eventually needed the space for its own court system.

When things started opening post-pandemic, the Webster Community Chest looked for a way to help the food insecure without duplicating the efforts of other agencies. After beta-testing several options that could succeed in small spaces with only non-perishable foods, the Chest chose to offer meal kits that include recipes and the shelf-stable ingredients for them . . . and the Meal Center was born.

It first opened in a storage area generously provided by the United Methodist Church, then moved to Immanuel Lutheran Church when they offered the larger storage and distribution space available there. Food is distributed to clients identified through the Benefits Counselors, usually scheduled on the last Thursday of each month when SNAP and other benefits have often run out.

Meal Center co-directors Bonnie Reynolds and Mary Kay Barrett explain their reasons for accepting leadership in the project. Bonnie, one of the original organizers, found that she was able to put many of her skills and talents to good use . She currently keeps the inventory updated, purchases (on sale whenever possible) any food necessary for that month's recipes, delivers the food to the Meal Center (often using the Chest's van) and organizes the storage, sometimes with the help of volunteers who also manage the distribution. Bonnie finds inventory important because she can stockpile some "bonus food" for the distribution (such as January's extra oatmeal). Their cache of recipes to add to meal bags continues to grow, and that allows more variety at each meal distribution.



*The monthly distribution bags being packed.*

Mary Kay was an experienced volunteer in her Buffalo church and community when she moved to

Webster several years ago. She found the Chest and its developing Meal Center to be the perfect place for her energy and desire to serve. While packing meal bags, Mary Kay saw the need for food drives to supplement donations and the Chest's food purchases. She currently organizes food drives year-round, generally more frequently in the winter. She says the Webster community has been generous in response to these drives, and they help to keep the cost to the Chest as low as possible. Individuals, banks, churches, schools, scout troops, neighborhoods, organizations, apartment complexes, businesses and corporations all contribute to the success of the Meal Center. Mary Kay likes building important relationships as she informs Webster residents about food insecurities right in their own town. She also credits the volunteers as they help with this initiative in many ways.

In addition to the monthly distribution and preparations for that, the Meal Center is a resource for emergency situations where shut-ins, homeless or the sick have no food left and no way to get it. The center can help with specialty diets such as those requiring clear liquids. Bonnie and Mary Kay often donate foods they do not plan to use to local food pantries at Phillips Village, the Webster Library and the Immanuel Lutheran Church.

In the past year, an average of 63 bags were distributed to clients each month. The number of meal kits in each bag has been increased from three per family to four. Each meal kit serves four people. Thus, each bag contains a total of 16 meals. Larger families get a second supplemental bag.



*We thank Alex Scialdone for his substantial contribution enabling us to provide 4 meal kits to every family for all of 2025 rather than just 3 as before.*

Bonnie, Mary Kay and their volunteers have sought grants to remedy the paper bag handle breakage and found ways to choose ingredients that

can be used in more than one Meal Center recipe. They have tested new ideas like meal choices (which proved overly cumbersome) and kid bags of treats, which was successful and will continue.

Bonnie and Mary Kay have set their sights on further growth in 2025. They are considering many suggestions such as extra distribution days, more space, a freezer and refrigerator, a link to local farmers and bakers to get fresh produce and baked goods, more outreach, van shelving, and cooking classes to name a few.

Bonnie is proud of the Meal Center's work. "We have evolved a lot from early days into a fine-tuned operation today with eyes on the future to see what more can be done."

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### **ONESCHOOL GLOBAL BUYS FOOD FOR CHEST**

OneSchool Global may be a small private school, but they helped us in a big way. In February the school's 29 students raised \$3000 for the Webster Community Chest's Meal Center. Then with help from their teachers they checked the Chest website to see what food was needed and then researched the prices of the foods. After they calculated what they could buy with the money, they ordered it using the school's bulk food purchasing connections. They filled the Chest van with over 50 boxes of food when we went to pick it up.

Community outreach is a major part of the educational program at OneSchool Global, and they have been doing student fundraisers for several years to benefit Webster charitable organizations.



*OneSchool Global held a fundraiser that resulted in 50 boxes of food for the Chest. (Photo: Provided)*

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## HOLIDAY/SEASONAL COLLABORATION

On April 15, 2025, Webster Community Chest volunteers joined with Gathering Place Webster and Webster HOPE to provide a generous varied holiday food distribution to the agencies' clients. Webster HOPE hosted and led this distribution, just as the Chest did last fall. Volunteers are so experienced now that all went efficiently as carefully planned.



*Team Leaders (from left) Kris Lombardo (Chest), Marjory Morgan (WH) and Tracy Small (Chest).*

Volunteers from the three agencies donated, purchased, solicited from generous Webster individuals, businesses and organizations, stored and delivered food to WH storage, so that more volunteers could sort food into 200 bags ready for families to pick up.



*Bags waiting for distribution*

On April 15, client families drove to Webster HOPE to pick up those bags containing ingredients

and recipe for pumpkin soup, a variety of canned vegetables and fruit, cereal, coffee, cooking oil, cake mix, frosting, dish soap, hand-made dishcloth and fresh produce as well.



*West Herr Ford (with life-sized Josh Allen image) was once again on site, this time to distribute bread they contributed to the event.*



Volunteers and clients from the three agencies enjoy the distributions because it puts them in touch with each other in a different way than from the agencies' regular services.

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Thank you for this and all the ways you support the Webster Community Chest.

For more information, visit us at <https://webcommchest.org/>.

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(Contributions by Kathy Taddeo, Bonnie Reynolds, Mary Kay Barrett, Jason Lee, Tracy Dennis, Margery Morgan, Robert Grenier, and Michael Grenier.)