



Mobile food pantry shifts into gear in Rochester



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Maureen Vieira, left, and Nora DuPont stand beside the mobile food pantry at the Rochester Council on Aging. Photos by Grace Roche

ROCHESTER — After about a year of paperwork and preparation, Nora DuPont’s community nutrition project is ready to hit the road.

She’s the founder of From Georgia, With Love, a nonprofit organization that operates a mobile food pantry in Rochester. The truck — filled with neatly organized shelf-stable and refrigerated food — will soon begin operations at the Council on Aging.

The truck’s first day of operations will be May 30 from 10 a.m. to noon, and will be parked at the Council on Aging at the same time the last Saturday of each month.

DuPont said she was inspired to start the nonprofit after the death of her mother Georgia Smith, who she named it after.

“My mom, she was a sweetheart, and she was very good at finding somebody who needed something and very quietly went and took care of it,” she said.

At the funeral, people who knew her mother shared stories about her generosity and kindness with DuPont. She said with plenty of

free time in retirement, she wanted to carry on her mother's legacy and give back to the community.

At first DuPont tried to partner with an area church to open a food pantry, but after complications and roadblocks decided to start her own organization.

"I said, 'You know what? I'm just going to start my own nonprofit and go from there,' so that's basically what I did," she said. "I got some of my friends together to be part of the board, and here we are."

One of those friends, Maureen Vieira, worked along with DuPont as a special education teacher in New Bedford. Both said they saw how food helped connect people when they would work in the kitchen while they were teachers.

"You could really connect with kids over food," Vieira said. "They'd cook with us and they would relax and open up with us, and food was a big part of their life."

DuPont plans to expand her reach to neighboring towns, and knew a mobile pantry would best suit her goals.

The vehicle also allows people to privately make use of the nonprofit's offerings without fear of being seen, as it can be parked in discreet locations. Vieira said this will let people "slip in and slip out" without potentially feeling embarrassed they need the extra help.

“Sometimes it's people who are working people, but they might have lost their job, or they might be going through a tough time, and haven't had to do this ever, so we'll be conscious of that,” she said.

With the nonprofit established, DuPont turned to community organizations to prepare for opening day. She reached out to several groups, including councils on aging, schools and scout troops to find help collecting donations and potential places to park the mobile pantry.

For DuPont, those partnerships are a way to share resources and amplify the nonprofit's mission.

“They have a ton of resources to share. The more we talk to other people, you find out they have this or they have that,” she said. “The main thing is to work with as many partners as we can, and to be able to utilize some of the resources that they have.”









