

South Salem spotlight with Cindy Ulshafer

By Cindy Ulshafer

South Salem Spotlight

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Clearly enjoying herself, Executive Director Marci Mattoso was calling out winners of door prizes donated from local businesses when I found her at the Neighborhood Food Drive and Free Barbecue at Hope Station Community Services on Sept. 25.

Two years ago, Mattoso modeled Hope Station after Birch Community Services in Portland, where she'd interned as a nonprofit manager. The program fills a unique niche, helping families who have an earned income, not eligible for government assistance, yet can't afford living expenses.

"I grew up very poor. I know the hardship for families," she said. Lessening the financial stress also can reduce child abuse and domestic violence, she said.

A food bank, educational classes and other necessities are offered to the 37 families currently served in Salem. Every month each family pays a monthly participation fee of \$25 and gives two hours of volunteer time to the program.

They receive about \$150 in groceries in return. Suzanne Whelan said being involved gives a sense of ownership. Her husband is laid off, and she's working.

"We love the idea that we can contribute to this instead of getting a government handout," Whelan said. At the barbecue, her children had their faces painted, then made a beeline to the bounce house, said daughter Chloe Whelan.

Affectionately, Suzanne introduced volunteer Carlie Sever, saying, "She takes care of us here."

"It's a snowball effect," Beth Bowman said, never thinking her family would be needing help.

Previously, her husband had worked for 30 years in construction until he was injured. Accepting assistance felt dishonorable, but Hope Station helped to restore confidence. Bowman said she's made new dishes because of the great variety at the food bank, including seasonal fruits and vegetables.

"Since they're here I'm trying them, like lentil soup," she said.



Mika Hasegawa and Koto Yamamoto, students from TIUA, volunteer their time face painting at the food drive.

About Cindy

Cindy Ulshafer and her husband, Eddie, have been married for 32 years and live in South Salem. They have four adult children. Cindy is a volunteer tutor at Chemeketa Community College. She loves to travel, cook and entertain.

Between tours of Hope Station for visitors, office assistant Nancy Taylor said, "I was assigned to work with Pastor Marci from the beginning" after meeting at church.

The Keizer Community Stage Band, under Dennis Bierman's direction, provided music, and Alice Thomas sang jazz tunes.

Melissa Hescoek, owner of Target Plastics, and her assistant Gretchen Schumacher were frying elephant ears for the nonprofit event "for the love of it."

"The website has a plethora of information," said volunteer Lore Ivie about the faith-based program, including the motto, "Serving, supporting, empowering."

Community members can donate financially or with their time.

Like Suzanne said: "It's families helping families."

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