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Scouts' food drive, pantry get big boosts from UPMC

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By Ervin Dyer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

UPMC Health Plan yesterday donated \$125,000 to the Boy Scouts' Scouting for Food drive to build awareness of the drive and to purchase food and household items for those in need.

UPMC Health Plan will donate another \$125,000 directly to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

Nearly 8,000 scouts throughout southwestern Pennsylvania are participating in the 20th annual campaign this year. Last year, they brought in 3.7 million units of food, worth about \$2.7 million. This year, they are aiming for 5 million units.

In addition to having 200 drop-off sites, the scouts have created a virtual food drive that allows donors to shop for food and give money through a secure online site -- go to www.pittsburghfoodbank.org and click on Scouting for Food.

With the UPMC Health Plan donations and assistance from local radio and TV stations that are airing its public service announcements, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank hopes more people will learn of the need.

Food bank officials say the increased awareness is necessary as hunger is exacerbated during the summer because children are out of school and not getting meals there, so struggling families are more challenged to put nutritious food on the table.

The products donated in the Scouting for Food drive will reach the food bank for packaging and distribution just as schools are closing for the summer.

It will be timely, said food bank officials, because in Allegheny County, of the 120,000 people who receive supplemental groceries each month, 35,000 are working poor, 16,000 are elderly, 17,000 are laid-off or disabled workers, and 37,000 are younger than 18.