

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

## Scott Lammie: Holes in the safety net Scouts need help in seeking to end hunger across our region

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Most Americans believe that chronic hunger exists only in foreign lands. But a recent local study commissioned by the Forbes Funds reported that just 13 percent of those surveyed said that hunger in our region is a serious problem.

There is also a widely held perception that an effective domestic "safety net" exists to adequately provide for those in need of food and shelter. In addition to environmental devastation, Hurricane Katrina vividly exposed our nation and the world to the extremes of poverty in America and the frailty of government assistance which is expected to protect our citizens during times of crisis.

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**Scott Lammie**, CFO of UPMC Health Plan, is the 2006 general chairman for Scouting for Food.

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While chronic hunger in our region is largely hidden from public view, its long-term effects are as equally devastating for those affected as the ravages inflicted by natural disasters.

Poverty and related socio-economic problems, including minimum wage inadequacy, are underlying causes of hunger. An estimated 36 million Americans (12.5 percent) now live below the poverty line (\$19,350 for a family of four); 13 million are children. Food insecurity and chronic hunger has become a major issue facing America.

About one in five Pittsburgh residents (64,000) and about one in nine Allegheny County residents (140,000) live in poverty. More than 41,000 children in Allegheny County are living below the poverty line. Our region could fill Heinz Field to capacity (65,000) at least four times with local families and individuals living in poverty, with nearly one-third of the seats occupied by children.

America's safety net is full of holes. Only about one in seven eligible children receives a child care subsidy. Hungry children suffer two to four times as many health problems as those who are adequately fed. Chronic hunger causes anxiety, low self-esteem and hostility in children. Hunger interferes with a child's learning ability from an early age, including significantly higher rates of illness and school absenteeism.

While we should continue to strongly advocate our legislators to preserve and enhance government funding to support these programs, we should no longer simply presume that our government's response will be sufficient.

The Boy Scouts of America, Greater Pittsburgh Council's 20th annual Scouting for Food drive is under way in April. More than 8,000 Boy Scouts and leaders, and 260,000 employees in companies, government agencies, schools, churches, and community organizations are participating in this campaign, which has collected more than 71 million food items for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank since 1987.

UPMC Health Plan is partnering with the Boy Scouts and the Food Bank to financially support the 2006 Scouting for Food drive and the Food Bank's public education "Campaign to End Hunger," with a total contribution of \$250,000.

Please help us to eradicate hunger in our region. Visit [www.gpc-bsa.org](http://www.gpc-bsa.org) or [www.pittsburghfoodbank.org](http://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org) to learn more and contribute online. We sincerely thank you for your generosity in helping to serve those less fortunate than ourselves.