

Lexington Pantry seeks to end hunger and give hope



Volunteers load the bed of a truck with food donations from Lexington Food Pantry Oct. 27, 2021, on the grounds of Saints College in Lexington, Miss. Holmes County supervisors assisted in the delivery of goods to members of the large rural county unable to easily travel to the event. Sarah Warnock/MCIR

By Sarah Warnock
Mississippi Center For
Investigative Reporting

Harvest time in the Mississippi Delta, a rolling emerald expanse of crops. The romantic vision is like a mirage against the glaring light of the nutritional disparity borne by residents here — many for generations.

Holmes County, Mississippi, despite a blanket of 764 square miles of fertile, arable soil, knows this disparity all too well.

Mississippi native W. Ralph Eubanks wrote eloquently in the Oxford American. “I always knew when the Delta was approaching, since it seemed as if everything changed when we reached Yazoo City. The kudzu-covered hills disappeared, and the land flattened out completely and became more expansive. By the time we arrived in Mileston, the horizon appeared so endless that it was as if my father and I had entered another world.”

But as Eubanks’ own fam-

ily found, reaping what is sown has remained seemingly at arm’s length for many poor and mostly Black residents.

Now a diverse group of Mississippians has joined efforts to battle the era of ravaging malnutrition, creating a drive for better health and sustained hope by providing nutritious food in place of high-calorie, low-protein convenience store offerings that have fueled the obesity and diabetes epidemics. Lexington Food Pantry has found a home on the grounds of historic Saints College on Highway 17 in Lexington. County. Sarah Warnock/MCIR

It may be hard to fathom a place so endlessly rich in soil as home to a population with so many living below the poverty line. But the long line of cars rolling onto the campus of Saints College, at 9 am, on the last Wednesday of October, was undeniable proof of the reality.

Lexington Food Pantry fundraiser Kathleen Hooker Waldrop says the pantry’s mission is “improving health and wellbeing of Holmes County residents by providing access to healthy food, nutrition education, and required resources. Healthy food for a healthy people.”

The organization’s mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of Lexington and surrounding communities by providing access to healthy food, nutrition awareness, and cooking education. Sarah Warnock/MCIR

Holmes County has a per capita income of less than \$15,000 and a population of roughly 25 persons per square mile. MCIR visited the county during the height of COVID-19 in 2020. The lack of decent jobs has led to a massive brain drain, said William Dean Jr., who in 1974 became the first African American elected superintendent of schools in Holmes County. “We just don’t have any industry here,” he said. “If people finish school, they

just leave.”

Lexington Food Pantry’s board of directors and officers consist of local clergy, some county supervisors and residents. They are aided by community partners and U.S. Department of Agriculture grants, the Mississippi Food Network, Open Table, Aim for Change, Mississippi State University Extension Service, Lexington aldermen, local students and youth organizations, among others. Together, they provide manpower, funding and supplies.

Jackson native and Lexington Food Pantry President Johnny Black raises cattle and started the 501C3 Rabbits of Relevance to contribute, in part, to the pantry’s supply chain.

“The goal is to raise, harvest and distribute 100 rabbits a month to food pantries for free. ...each rabbit feeds about four to five people. So, we can give about 5,000 to 6,000 meals a year,” Black said.

The pantry forges on, with distributions planned for the last Wednesday of every month, with plans for a holiday turkey drive and GoFundMe account in the works.



Johnny Black of Ridge-land, Miss., volunteers Oct. 27, 2021, in Lexington, Miss., with Lexington Food Pantry at Saints College, sorting through boxes of fresh produce supplies, to distribute to residents of Holmes County. The organization’s mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of Lexington and surrounding communities by providing access to healthy food, nutrition awareness, and cooking education. Sarah Warnock/MCIR

At close of distribution day in October, the pantry collected more than 200 forms with basic demographic information the Mississippi Food Network requires for residents receiving boxes of food. Many drivers picked up boxes for more than one family and for individuals lacking transportation. The pantry gave out 600 boxes with food from the four major food groups.

“In the Bible, you know, in the book of Acts -- they had all things come together. They brought their stuff together to help one another,” Willie Hodges, an elder at Guiding Light Church of God in Christ, said of the new pantry. “And that is what you should teach your kids to do, share.

“Growing up here, you know, when I was a boy, if

IN AND AROUND LEXINGTON BY LEONA (LENA) FIELDS

Miya Fort was carried to the hospital on first Saturday night, not first Sunday night. I’m sorry for the error. Linda Brownlow Cockrell’s brother is sick. Pray for Miya and Mr. Brownlow. Also pray for Rev. Henry Anderson, he is sick.

A teenager, John Morgan, woke up sick on Wednesday morning, November 17th. He was so weak his dad called the emergency ambulance to pick him up. After he was checked at the hospital

you had, then your neighbor had. If you didn’t have, and your neighbor had, then you had. We believed in sharing.”

in Lexington, he was airlifted to Jackson. I don’t know which hospital, but two family members let me know that he was real sick. Thursday I heard he had started talking some. Pray that this teenager will be alright. Let’s pray for John. Those of you that know him, talk to him and encourage him to be a good young man. I know one thing, he is a hard worker. He and his great grandfather, Mr. Joe Morgan, are always somewhere doing some kind of work. He sings with the Morgan Jubilees.

Last Wednesday, the food pantry gave out bags and boxes of food. A long line of people got food. I hope they are thankful for the food.

Third Sunday, Rev. Melvin Russell was installed as pastor of M. Zion M.B. Church in Howard Bottom.

PrEPped and REDy, Together We Can!

CARNIVAL RIDES
MUSIC
FOOD
VENDORS
CASH GIVEAWAYS
AND MORE!

WORLD AIDS DAY 2021

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2021
10:00AM - 2:00PM
MALLORY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER
300 YAZOO STREET | LEXINGTON, MS 39095

New Garbage Service Starts Tuesday, November 30, 2021 for all Lexington Residents

Dear City of Lexington Residents,

WM is proud to be your new garbage collection service provider.

New 96-gallon wheeled carts with lids will be delivered on November 29 and 30. Wheeled carts are easy to move to the curb and lids keep waste contained and your community cleaner.

You may use your new cart or your existing cart for service on November 30. After that, only the WM cart will be serviced.

The new garbage pickup day for the City of Lexington will be Tuesday beginning November 30, 2021.

Please see the back side for proper cart placement.

Proper Cart Placement

Remember to place your carts at least 3 feet apart and 3 feet away from any obstacles (trees, cars, nailboxes, etc.) to allow the automatic arm to lift and empty the carts. Place wheels of cart toward house.

DO:

- Bag and tie trash inside the 96-gallon green trash cart. All trash must fit inside your cart with the lid fully closed to control pests and litter
- Have your cart at the curb in front of your home the night before or by 6 a.m. on Tuesday, your collection day
- Remove carts from the curb by the evening of your service day

DON'T:

- No materials outside the cart will be collected
- Household hazardous waste will not be collected

Need an Extra Cart?

You may order an extra cart for an additional charge. Call the City of Lexington at (662) 834-4381.