



204/4/Boston Cares, Local Organizations Partner to Fight February Cold and Hunger

By: Amelia Rayno

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What is pink, packed in water, and dubbed 'chicken of the sea'?

It's not just a cafeteria lady's favorite go-to ingredient; right now during local volunteering organization Boston Cares' February Food and Boot Drive, the tuna can represents tangible aid for impoverished children and families during a time stricken by cold weather and a collapsing economy.

"Obviously we're in an economic recession, and the number of families and seniors [who are] forced to choose between heating their homes or feeding their children is skyrocketing," said Rachel Ratner, Project and Event Planner of Boston Cares.

Boston Cares identified this critical need and acted, partnering with The Boston Globe and local volunteer organizations, Building Impact, and Greater Boston Corporate Volunteer Council, to put together a month-long goods-raiser.

The organizations contacted The Greater Boston Food Bank and Cradles to Crayons, a company that serves low income and homeless children, and found that the greatest needs from each were sources of protein, and children's winter boots, respectively.

Ratner said the goal of the drive is to collect 10,000 pounds of protein, which would be enough to feed 65,000 struggling individuals for one month, and as many boots as they can.

But their serious ambitions do not mean the partnered companies are simply running a dry, business-like fundraiser.

Across the community, these organizations are finding creative and effective ways to bring relief to those in need.

Corporate Volunteer Council is hosting a Charity Cocktail Party on February 24th at Newbury Street's chic restaurant and bar, Sonsie. Six cans of protein or two pairs of gently worn children's boots will earn patrons a free cocktail.

We wanted to do something different," CVC Membership Chair Abby Grant said. "There's a lot of value in drives, but we wanted to engage a networking aspect in this as well."

Although the primary objective is to collect goods, Grant said CVC's focus extends beyond just collecting cans and clothing. She said they hope the event will provide a forum for valuable networking, as well as expose potential new members to the organization and its mission.

"There's so much value in getting to know other people [who are involved with similar organizations], and find out what sorts of activities they're doing within their community, things that work," she said. "[The program] gives us all an important perspective as we're going through a challenging time that there are people who don't even have food."

Building Impact is coming up with their own innovative ways of collecting, based on their specific resources. The organization is partnered with 45 real estate firms, office buildings and residential apartment buildings around Boston, and is using those locations as outlets for amassing goods.

"We have donation boxes in 45 lobbies across city, and within buildings we're working with 550 companies," said Jennifer Green, Managing Director of Building Impact. "We've identified some active companies who wanted to get involved more," and conduct internal drives, she said, the list including real estate companies National Development, Paradigm Properties, Forest City, as well as DiCicco, an accounting firm, and The Boys and Girls Club of Boston.

"When we heard about the drive, we knew we had the reach to help, get companies on board, and engage the people in our buildings," Green said. "It so easy for us to plug into this collaborative need."

Building Impact has signs posted in elevators and lobbies of their buildings, constantly updating visitors and employees with upcoming events and new ways to get involved. The exposure has helped the February Food and Boot Drive, their latest project. In addition, the organization is hosting its own internal drive within the office. Green said she's on 'Team Tuna,' a group designated to collect cans of the 'chicken of the sea'.

And Green, just one person in one of the many organizations involved with this cause, says she believes that those little cans will add up to something meaningful.

Ratner agreed, and she said she encourages students in dorms and extracurricular activities to get involved, and start their own drive. "It's not too late," she said. "It's a realistic but ambitious goal that will help make a dent in the needs of the community."

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