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Thoughtful and thankful: Troy Turkey Trot once again puts local focus on Regional Food Bank and Joseph's House and Shelter



Volunteers ready the packaging line for Monday morning's mass distribution for the Regional Food Bank in Lansingburgh. (Erica Bouska – MediaNews Group)



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PUBLISHED: November 18, 2024 at 4:00 PM EST

LANSINGBURGH, N.Y. — Before thousands run and walk through downtown Troy next week, Trotter — and others from the Turkey Trot — swung by the Regional Food Bank's mass distribution at the Lansingburgh Boys and Girls Club Monday morning.

One of the two charities that the organization and its runners donate to, Troy Turkey Trot Event Director George Regan, said they've been working with the Regional Food Bank since he became director in 2012.

"I wanted to bring recognition to those areas of the community that really needed it, and hunger and homelessness were the two we settled on," Regan said, with Joseph's House and Shelter as the other main charity. "We thought they were good causes and we wanted to bring, you know, a focus to them so people remember them at least, you know, during Thanksgiving."

The event on Monday was one of the Regional Food Bank's normal mass distributions, said Tom Nardacci, CEO of the Regional Food Bank. They started the program during the pandemic where people could come by and receive a box of food filled with everything from direct-from-farm eggs to Chobani yogurt.



Tom Nardacci, CEO of the Regional Food Bank, speaks to volunteers Monday morning. (Erica Bouska – MediaNews Group)

Particularly, the mass distributions target areas that don't have as much food pantry access, Nardacci said, and as Lansingburgh is one of them, they reopened the site this past June. He estimated they'd serve around 275 folks that day, with people and cars starting to line up at 8:30 a.m. half an hour before distribution started.

This part of the year is a time to be thankful and thoughtful, Regan said, and these kinds of events encapsulate those feelings. It goes right back to the race's origins 108 years ago, he added.

In 1916, the race started to commemorate the return of World War I veterans and to spotlight them and their service to the country, Regan said. It makes sense for them to continue helping.



Prepared food boxes with everything from fresh fruit to canned goods at the Regional Food Bank's distribution center on Monday morning. (Erica Bouska – MediaNews Group)

“We run a community event,” he said. “It has a lot of history, a lot of tradition and the fact of us being associated with, you know, being thankful and helping to feed those that are somewhat less fortunate than we are, is a really good fit.”

Alongside their continued normal operations, the Regional Food Bank for the first time is distributing Thanksgiving meals, stepping in for Equinox, which has slowed and this year ended their meal program, Nardacci said. Their goal is to get food to 30,000 and give out 5,000 prepared meals.

They're a little nervous since they have everything planned but don't know what will happen on the day of. The bottom line is, however, there are 100,000 food-insecure people in the six Capital Region counties they serve, Nardacci said, and they won't reach them all.



Volunteers package boxes at a food distribution on Monday. (Erica Bouska – MediaNews Group)

On average, he said people come to food banks one and a half times per month, usually between paychecks. Many of those who come to their food distribution also have extenuating circumstances, he added. Their car broke down and they needed to get to work so they spent grocery money to fix it. They got laid off from one of their jobs. Rent went up.

They saw overwhelming need during the pandemic and the numbers have not dropped down since, Nardacci said. Looking at the gathering line on Monday, he said no one is taking advantage. They are underpaid and overworked.



The Regional Food Bank's distribution center at the Lansingburgh Boys and Girls Club on Monday morning. (Erica Bouska – MediaNews Group)

“Hunger, you know, kind of knows no bounds,” Nardacci said. “Every community in the Capital Region has it, every school district has it and we’re just trying to help figure out (and) identify those places where there’s a need that we can, you know, get in and work with, you know, those communities.”

That’s why the Troy Turkey Trot, in addition to the great day and tradition, has a huge impact, Nardacci said. The racers travel from across the country, but the donations stay local.

Last year, Regan said they had about 6,400 participants, a number that Nardacci said he wants to see rise year after year. The runs and walks are a part of their lifestyle, Regan said, and they want to continue to provide the community with an event they need.

“It’s a special event,” Nardacci said. “We’ve been really proud to partner with the Turkey Trot for a long time, so we definitely, you know, we want to see record numbers at the race this year, and we want to see record numbers of donations to help people in need.”

