

*“Money goes only so far and sometimes people have to decide whether they’re going to feed their families versus paying a bill, and how do you make a decision between two necessities?”*

MONIKA ANDREWS, PRESIDENT OF THE BROCKPORT ECUMENICAL FOOD SHELF

# No summer vacation for nutritious eating

**ERNST LAMOTHE JR.**  
STAFF WRITER

Monika Andrews describes summers as downtime for the Brockport Ecumenical Food Shelf. Families typically arrive at the Main Street facility once a month to receive food baskets.

But this year has been different. The recession has left families scrambling for food, and many are turning to summer nutrition programs run by schools to feed their children. But the economy has squeezed those programs, too, and school districts, including Brockport, had to cut back on their services, leaving community food banks and others to fill the void.

“Money goes only so far and sometimes people have to decide whether they’re going to feed their families versus paying a bill, and how do you make a decision between two necessities?” said Andrews, president of the Brockport Ecumenical Food Shelf. “In the past, our first

**FOOD, PAGE 4A**

priority was as an emergency food shelter, but we’ve had to be more than that because the need is so great for children need-

ing food during the summer.”

Despite the demand, only a small portion of children eligible for summer food programs participate, because of lack of food organization sponsors, transportation to sites or public awareness. Nationwide, three million children accessed summer meal programs last year, according to the National School Lunch program. Yet about 19 million children received free or reduced-price meals during the school year. In New York, about 300,000 children participate in summer food programs; however, when school is in session, close to 1.7 million children receive free or reduced lunch.

The state allocates more than \$3 million to Summer Food Service programs to supplement summer breakfast, lunch and snack initiatives. Meals include whole grains, fresh fruit, vegetables, lean meat and low-fat milk. Promoted on buses, fliers and websites, the food programs sometimes fail to get any traction.

“If they don’t have to go to summer school, kids are a difficult group to

lure back to school just to eat a good meal,” said Paula Tynner-Doyle, New York state schools food program specialist. “And even schools that might want to offer it can’t because of budget constraints or summer construction that makes their buildings uninhabitable for months.”

When Brockport Central School District, where 35 percent of students receive free and reduced-price lunches during the school year, could no longer offer a summer food program this year, the Ecumenical Food Shelf stepped up. The food bank offered Brockport, Sweden and Clarkson families an opportunity to pick up supplies more often than once a month.

“Kids are at home all day, which means they are actually eating more food than they would during the school year, so families are going to need more help,” said Marne Johnson, director of the Brockport food shelf. “Families are just getting by during the summer.”

Even Fairport, which has fewer low-income students, increased its regular lunch prices for



the upcoming school year. Although the charge does not affect free or reduced lunch applicants, it's a sign of the cost it takes to provide sufficient, well-balanced meals.

"Like everyone else, we're dealing with increased costs for food and supplies and labor," said Beth Krause, director of food services for the district. "We'll be able to improve menu offerings by adding whole grains, offering fresh fruits and vegetables and adjusting menus for students with food allergies."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and other food-related organizations champion childhood nutrition and link it to success and attentiveness in the classroom. The federal stimulus program pro-

vided some relief for food services, but federal offi-

cial are searching for more organizations to provide options for low-income students from late June to Labor Day.

Tyner-Doyle said simple healthy meals promote brain development and make a valuable difference in a child's life.

"It's as simple as milk instead of sugary drinks, fruits and vegetables instead of chips and snacks, protein instead of saturated fats," she said. "We have to keep getting the message about students needing nutritious meals because kids who aren't being helped in the summer sometimes take until November to get back on track mentally to where they left off."

Foodlink's summer program, in its third week, continues to expand every year, serving 2,500 meals daily in 60 sites through-

out Rochester. Combining nutrition and education, the organization not only hands out lunches but teaches kids about healthy alternatives and offers cooking lessons.

Even with the large number of meals served, officials said they can't even come close to meeting the need.

"During the holiday season or even during the school year, we have volunteers and an outpouring from people," said Jeanette Batiste, chief operating officer for Foodlink. "But when school is over, people become preoccupied and we seem to forget about kids. We forget their chronic food problems which becomes the silent issue that plagues these young kids all summer long." □

ELAMOTHE@DemocratandChronicle.com



JAY CAPERS staff photographer

**Dave Hale hands out food at the Brockport Ecumenical Food Shelf. The group provides families with summer meals so schoolchildren can maintain nutritious eating habits.**