

Tweet for a good cause: Twitter fuels food drive

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Call it a marriage of bread and vine.

To raise funds, a Rochester-area provider of emergency food hooked up with an online social network to notify potential donors.

The first local "Twestival 4 **Foodlink**," a fundraising event designed to bring significant awareness to the hunger crisis, took place Thursday at Boulder Coffee in Brooks Landing at 955 Genesee St.

Twestival is a cross between Twitter, an online social networking site, and the word "festival." The Rochester Twestival 4 Foodlink was organized using Twitter and other social media to spread the word.

Two hours into the four-hour event more than 200 people had attended. "People are coming and going, and we expect more," said Frances Pesavento of Rochester, director of programs and development for Foodlink.

"We're shooting for three-grand," said Twestival organizer Matthew Ray of Rochester, moments after the festival started. All the proceeds

will support Foodlink — a regional branch of the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, Feeding America.

Foodlink reached out to Twestival organizers with the idea for a local Twestival after the first national Twestival in February.

"We're kind of going into the social media world so this was an opportunity to take this into an in-person interaction," Pesavento said.

"The funds are going to help us serve more people in need. Currently with the economy the way it is, we're seeing an increase in need, and the more we can raise the more food **TWESTIVAL, PAGE 4B** we can get into the hands of those who need it.

"We're seeing more and more people coming to the food pantries and soup kitchens that we help out," Pesavento said. "We're seeing a 20 percent increase each year for two years now."

One hundred percent of the donations go to Foodlink's collection of initiatives, including a regional food bank, Freshwise Catering, Freshwise Farms and the Farmers Fulfillment Center.

Each year, an estimated

94,400 area residents turn to Foodlink emergency providers for help. Their services include soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters. Foodlink rescues and redistributes more than 8.5 million pounds of food annually to a network of 550 member agencies within a 10-county area in central and western New York. Since its inception 30 years ago, Foodlink has distributed more than 150 million pounds of food — worth approximately \$125 million — to feed the hungry in the greater Rochester area.

The hope is that Thursday's Twestival "will go a long way in bringing to light the hunger crisis that exists within our own community," Ray said.

Two live bands and plenty of food and beverages all but ensured that anyone who wanted to have a good time could have one while supporting those in need.

"We are certainly very excited to be the first local charity selected," Pesavento said. "If it is successful, and I think everyone is having a good time so far, I'm sure we will try it again." □

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