

Fire for the Food Pantry *by Rose Marie Wade*



On October 18th, I made my annual phone call to Linda Clark, Director of the Belvidere Boone County food Pantry (BBCFP) to ask if the week of November 7th was a good time for the Candlewick Flames to wrap the Christmas gifts for the poor that come to the Pantry for help. The Flames have taken on this labor of love for the Food Pantry for the past three years and look forward to the time spent wrapping gifts donated by local businesses for the needy. "We have no gifts to wrap," Linda Clark told me. The accounts were taken from the BBCFP by Feeding America. "Children and families will be fed and supplied with Christmas gifts by these organizations, but not necessarily our poor in Boone County," Linda elaborated. The Northern Illinois Food Pantry distributes donated, government, and purchased food through a network of over 600 nonprofit food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens and other food assistance sites. It is the single most important source of food for their partner agencies, accounting for 70 percent of all food provided to feed hungry people directly. The BBCFP is in partnership with the Northern Illinois Food Bank by being a member nonprofit food pantry. The Belvidere Boone County Food Pantry received much of its food from donations of the large corporations in the area such as General Mills, Wal-Mart, Target and so on. In addition, they also received merchandise from these organizations and others such as Home Depot, Bed Bath and Beyond, Pottery Barn and others. Merchandise came in the form of toys for the children, cooking utensils, dishes, tools, plumbing fixtures, small appliances and more. The larger food banking organization, Feeding America, went to the corporate headquarters of major businesses and contracted to be the sole recipient of their donated goods. This, in turn, cut out direct donations to the local food pantries including the BBCFP which has become a one stop shop for the poor providing food, clothing, some furniture, small appliances and more. I asked Linda Clark how the Candlewick Flames could help. She told me that she can still get the non-food items through yet another program called Good 360. This is a program where the food pantry can get products from some retail companies that gave to the local organizations before they contracted with Good 360, but now the local food pantry must pay a fee to receive the donated goods. The fee for Home Depot by Good 360 is \$600 annually and for Bed Bath and Beyond, \$350. When the fee is paid for one year the food pantry will receive the products on a regular basis from a selected store. Linda needed the funds to purchase the contract for the donated goods of Home Depot and Bed Bath & Beyond. I took this request to the Candlewick Flames at our October 16th dinner event. Five couples came forward and put up the \$950 to purchase those two contracts for a year. The Flames held their annual fund raiser for the Pantry by "passing the jar" at the November 15th dinner event and collected \$1530. With the \$1530, the BBCFP can purchase at least four times that amount in food from the Northern Illinois Food Bank. In spite of the frustration we felt over the BBCFP not having Christmas gifts for the poor children in Boone County, we did what we could and asked God to provide. If you are a believer in Miracles, here's one that will linger long after the Christmas season is gone. On Tuesday, November 29th, Linda Clark called for help. This time,

however, it was because the organization "Toys For Tots" just dropped off, unexpectedly, 900 gifts/toys for children at the Belvidere Boone County Food Pantry. The toys needed to be gift wrapped on hursday, December 1st. "Could the Flames help us out?" Linda asked. Not only did the Flames converge on the Food Pantry, other organizations such as RSVP also gathered their members to volunteer time to get the job done. From "0 to 900" toys is a miracle and getting them wrapped before 2;30 PM on Thursday was a labor of love of mostly seniors who pitched in to get the job done. One comment that Linda made was that the Food Pantry was a place of "real joy" as the seniors and other volunteers wrapped gifts for children who just three weeks earlier would have received nothing. The Belvidere Boone County Food Pantry is referred to by many as "The Miracle on 5th Street". Indeed, The Miracle on 5th Street in Capron experienced its own miracle.