

CHARITY

New walk-in fridge boosts West Valley's food program

Donations distributed to those in need

By Keith Menconi

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West Valley Community Services is hailing the acquisition and installation of a new walk-in refrigerator that will enhance its efforts to distribute donated food to low-income individuals and families.

Staff and about a dozen other people gathered at the nonprofit's office in Cupertino on Feb. 7 to participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony for the refrigerator, located in an outdoor walkway next to the main facility.

The extra food storage is necessary to alleviate some of the growing hunger in the community amid a worsening housing crisis, said Josh Selo, the group's executive director.

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Interior of West Valley Community Services' new walk-in refrigerator that will support the group's food donation program.

Fridge

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Last year, West Valley Community Services saw a 35 percent increase in the number of people coming to it for help, he said.

"Given the significant housing challenges in the county and our clients' struggles to earn enough money in their jobs to cover their day-to-day expenses, it's not surprising to me at all that we've seen an increase in demand," he said.

The 8- by 10-foot insulated walk-in fridge cost about \$30,000 to purchase and install.

The cost was covered by a \$15,000 grant from the Rotary Club of Cupertino and money from the Western Digital Foundation and private donors. In all, West Valley Community Services managed to collect \$40,000 for the project and used the surplus money to construct an awning over the area directly in front of the refrigerator to shield volunteers from the weather.

"It's definitely something our community made happen by identifying a need and coming together," Selo said. "I feel very strongly that Cupertino is an incredibly caring community, that people

do care about the plight of their neighbors and their challenges and want to do what they can to reduce the suffering of people living in poverty."

The group installed the refrigerator last summer and fall and began storing food inside it late last year, he added.

Through its food pantry program, West Valley Community Services lets clients come by weekly to select from a variety of food donated by local grocery stores and the Second Harvest Food Bank. During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, 1,586 people received groceries, household items, diapers and personal care products, according to the nonprofit's website.

The program aims to reduce the amount of money low-income people must spend on food so they have more to pay for rent, transportation and child care, Selo said.

Although the plight of low-income residents is becoming more dire, Selo said last week's ribbon-cutting ceremony was an important way to thank the group's donors and supporters.

"We need to celebrate any opportunity that we can to reduce the suffering and challenges our clients face," he said.