

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County Commissioners: 'Be a Bright Spot for the Hungry During Upcoming Canopy of Lights'
Food drive to kick off during annual event on November 24th and will run through 'Giving Tuesday,'
November 28th

Monroe County, IN—Hoping to help area food pantries make up donation shortfalls, the Monroe County Commissioners are encouraging members of the public to drop off non-perishable food donations during this year's Canopy of Lights festivities. Set to begin at 6:45 p.m. on Friday, November 24th, the free event has taken place annually in downtown Bloomington since the mid 1980s.

“The Hoosier Hills Food Bank will have a tent on Kirkwood near the main stage to collect food as well as cash donations during the event,” says Penny Githens, president of the Monroe County Board of Commissioners. “We hope folks who are able to do so will be a bright spot for the hungry in our area by dropping off extra canned goods or other non-perishables.”

During a recent Monroe County Board of Commissioners meeting, both Hoosier Hills Food Bank Executive Director Julio Alonso and Pantry 279 Director Cindy Chavez noted that, although overall need is up, food donations are down. “We have already distributed about 4.2 million pounds of food this year and we're running 400,000 pounds behind last year's numbers,” Alonso reported. “That's not a factor of demand. It's a factor of supply.”

For its part, Pantry 279 presently serves between 8,500 and 9,500 people each month, but the need is even greater. “Unfortunately, our local food insecurity problem is a reflection of a much larger, nationwide trend,” says Julie Thomas, vice president of the Monroe County Board of Commissioners.

According to the USDA's most recent annual report on food insecurity in the United States, between 2021 and 2022, an additional 10 million people became food insecure.

“This is a special time of year for many in Monroe County, and, as we gather together for the lighting of the canopy, we hope people will take a moment to think about their own good fortune and consider reaching out to help their neighbors who may be less fortunate,” says Monroe County Commissioner Lee Jones.

Food drive collection barrels will also be on hand inside the Monroe County Courthouse lobby through Giving Tuesday, November 28th. Particularly in demand are low-sugar and low-salt canned fruits and vegetables, canned soups and stews, canned proteins, canned tomato sauce, and boxed cereals, pasta, macaroni and cheese, and bread or muffin mixes.

The commissioners will offer brief remarks from the Kirkwood Avenue Stage before the canopy lighting. “I'm trying to resist the urge to say something like, 'Bring a can of peas to the canopy!’” Thomas laughs. “But, seriously, the need in Monroe County is great and this is a great opportunity to help.”

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