

# The Chatham News

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Reporting Activities, Interest and News of the People  
of Chatham County, North Carolina

### PORCH Extends Into Chatham, Benefits CORA

By Bill Willcox

The shelves of CORA, the largest food pantry in the county, have been much better stocked in the last year and a half because of a grass-roots hunger relief model that started in Chapel Hill and has spread to northeast Chatham County.

About two and a half years ago, three Chapel Hill women started PORCH (People Offering Relief for Chapel Hill Carrboro Homes.). Two of the women were working in a food pantry when they learned the pantry needed more cans of tuna. They asked their neighbors to help and were delighted and overwhelmed when they soon had 200 donated cans. They realized they had the building blocks for a new model for grass-roots hunger relief and soon founded PORCH.

The concept was simple: neighbors would ask neighbors to join in a program whereby individuals would leave non-perishable food items on their porches once a month, to be collected and distributed to a food pantry.

PORCH proved popular and grew quickly in Orange County. It now involves 2500 residents living in 165 neighborhoods scattered throughout Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

“What we learned is that people need to be approached, to be asked,” said Cotton. “The system works so well when someone is asked by a neighbor in their own neighborhood.”

Neighborhood coordinators generally communicate with e-mails specifying which types of food are most needed.

PORCH has expanded rapidly to Raleigh, Durham, Cary, Morrisville and one is just getting started in Hillsborough. A PORCH group even organized in California after an article appeared in Redbook magazine.

In Chatham County there are two major PORCH programs: in Fearington Village and Governor’s Club; as well as one neighborhood in Miles Branch.

The Fearington Village PORCH group is the largest in the county, having contributed nine tons of food to CORA since its inception in May, 2011. It was first organized by Fearington Havurah, a Jewish sponsored social and cultural group open to all members of the community.

Rosalyn Darling, the overall organizer of PORCH at Fearington, works with 19 neighborhood coordinators, and two couples who collect the drop-offs and deliver them to CORA.

CORA Executive Director Beth Budd said the Fearington Village group has “done a phenomenal job with the program. They consistently bring us 800-1,000 pounds of food.”

Budd estimated that 1,000 pounds of food has a monetary value of \$860.

Last month, in August, PORCH at Fearington collected 1,140 pounds of food. The group’s best month was March, 2012, when they brought in 1,531 pounds.

“We are by far the largest contributor of any group in Chatham County,” Darling said. “They have made us a line item on their budget because we contribute so much each month.”

Darling said PORCH is a great program that helps fill in the gaps of CORA’s donations.

“Although CORA gets donations from stores, by collecting from individuals they get a better variety of things. They also appreciate that we do it year round. Churches and other organizations typically do food drives around the holidays but the need is sometimes greater when kids are home from school so they appreciate that we do this all year.”

Governor’s Club also has an active and productive PORCH program. It was initiated by CORA Board member Udo Koopman in early spring, 2011. There

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are now 15 neighborhood coordinators. Of the 850 homes in Governor's Village, about 100-150 regularly participate. The highest total collected so far was 650 pounds in a month. The total contribution to CORA has totaled about 3.5 tons to date.

Koopman said there used to be biannual food collection program in Governor's Club, but PORCH has tripled the level of contributions.

Other PORCH groups are just getting started in the county. The Preserve and Briar Chapel are two developments that may soon have a program.

Budd encourages anyone interested in starting a PORCH program in their neighborhood to follow through.

"Any group can start," she said. "It doesn't have to be a big neighborhood. All you need to do is call and let us know you want to start a PORCH program and we provide information and materials to get you started. It can be as small as your neighborhood or street."

Budd is thrilled with increased donations that PORCH has brought CORA.

"It has benefitted us so much," she said. "I can't give you a percentage, but we get well over a thousand pounds of food a month more than we had been getting. Also it helps with

communication with those two groups as far as what our food needs are. For instance, right now, because of weather conditions in the Midwest, canned fruit is very low. We can let people know we need that for instance."

She said PORCH donations go even further because of a generous matching pledge of 30 cents per pound provided by Chapel Hill Tire Car Care Center. This sponsorship is expected to generate up to \$4,500 for CORA this year. Marc Pons of Chapel Hill Tire said, "We are committed to serving the communities within which we are doing business by reaching out to neighbors in need. Our partnership with CORA allows us to achieve this goal in Chatham County."

While PORCH has not reached the western part of the county, Budd said there is no reason neighborhoods couldn't organize there to benefit the West Chatham Food Pantry.

Budd mentioned that September is Hunger Action Month, a good time to keep the needs of the county's food pantries in mind.

