

# Mission critical

Flagstaff charities say the recession has stretched their resources to the breaking point

By DAILY SUN STAFF

**R**equests for emergency food at one food bank have gone from 8,000 pounds to more than 39,00 pounds.

Toy drive donations are down, and families in need can't find sponsor families to help them buy Christmas gifts and other items.

And by next year, unemployment could hit more than 8 percent in Flagstaff.

In a time of economic recession, social service agencies and charitable causes throughout Flagstaff are having to settle for less to address a larger need that is compounded by the holiday season.

## Catholic Charities: More turnaways

Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul Society have experienced an increase in the demand for services while donations are remaining flat or decreasing.

Bill Packard at St. Vincent de Paul Society said donations are coming in at a steady pace, but the society's help line continues to ring off the hook.

For instance, in October and November 2007, the society helped 804 people and handed out 175 food boxes. This year the numbers jumped 1,062 people and 257 food boxes for the same two months.

"The bad thing about this economy is our donations will decline," he added.

See CHARITIES, A12

In a month, the society's help includes:

- Serving 800 breakfasts on Saturday mornings
- Helping more than 150 stranded travelers.
- Sort, pack and deliver 200 food boxes.

The society's programs are run completely by volunteers and no money goes toward overhead.

Victor Hudenko, regional director of Catholic Charities,

said turnaway numbers for service are increasing.

Sharon Watson, in charge of the Christmas Program at Catholic Charities said, "We've had to turn away a lot. We have a lot less sponsors this year."

She added, "People just can't afford to donate this year."

So far 65 families have been paired with a sponsor family, but 14 families are still looking for someone to help them with Christmas gifts and other holiday items.

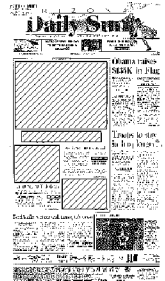
Sandi Flores, shelter family services coordinator at Catholic Charities, said the emergency and transitional housing locations are full and currently there are 28 families on the waiting list.

In 2007, Catholic Charities turned away 24 families needing emergency shelter, transitional housing or permanent supportive housing. In 2008, that number has grown to 63 families (Editor's note: For more on Flagstaff's shelter crisis, see the Dec. 7 *Daily Sun*).

The Flagstaff Family Food Center reported last month seeing an increase in meals served at a time when those numbers have a tendency to decrease.

Elizabeth Savage Johnson of the Think Jesus Project said of Berg's Barbecue at Killip Elementary School, "We're seeing more families and kids coming in more and more."

The barbecue, which takes place on Sunday, typically feeds 180 to 250 people in the winter. But those numbers have increased to nearly 300.



Hosts are also needed for the barbecue.

"We're on fumes," Johnson said. "We're really trying hard to find more donations."



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Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun

**BONITA CHEE LOOKS** through a food bin at the Northern Arizona Food Bank Friday morning.

Printing imperfections present during scanning.