



RENTON MAGAZINE / ANDREW FICKES

Volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul conference at St. Anthony's Church have seen more demand in food bank services.

## St. Vincent de Paul volunteers see a rise in need

BY ANDREW FICKES

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which has been active in the Renton community since 1947, is – not surprisingly – experiencing a sharp increase in demand for services.

“Normally, over the past two years, we’ve given food to 40 families a month, and in January, February, and March, it’s gone up to 60 families a month,” says Lani Cavit, president of the local conference.

“A year ago we were serving 120 sack lunches a month. Now, in the past two months, we’ve served 200 to 240 sack lunches a month.”

A worldwide organization that helps families with rental assistance, utilities, food and clothing, St. Vincent de Paul establishes “conferences” as its local unit of organization. Renton’s conference, affiliated with St. Anthony Church at 314 S. Fourth St., has 120 volunteers.

Since 2007, the Renton Community Foundation has provided annual grants of \$1,000 to fund the sack lunch program. The St. Anthony conference also has a new partnership with the human services division at the City of Renton. For up to two years, the city will reimburse up to \$15,000 each year for utilities assistance provided to families.

Diane Utecht, a contract specialist with the division, said this was the first year the conference had applied for such a contract.

“We like that they’re an all-volun-

teer based agency in downtown Renton that services the needs that are high priority,” she says. “With the economy the way it is, all cities have seen a request for these services go up.”

The society was founded by Frederic Ozanam in Paris in 1833. While it is affiliated with the Catholic Church, St. Vincent helps families regardless of creed.

Cavit, who has been president of the St. Anthony’s conference for five-and-a-half years, says her father-in-law inspired her to serve.

“My father-in-law served in Tacoma and while I nursed him at the hospital [in Seattle], he was still doing his St. Vincent de Paul work,” she says. “I thought if he was this committed, I should get involved.”

There are 52 neighborhood conferences in King County affiliated with the Seattle/King Council of St. Vincent de Paul, which was founded in 1920.

The society initiates assistance to families with home visits. Calls answered by the Seattle/King County Council home office in south Seattle are directed to the appropriate conference.

“We helped almost 5,000 people in 2008 with rental assistance, utility assistance, food, clothing, and a variety of miscellaneous things,” says Cavit.

Many in the community are probably most familiar with St. Vincent de Paul’s thrift stores. The Renton Highlands store is one of five in King County that provide clothing and household goods at low cost to families. The stores also provide jobs and retail training. Funds from the stores go into the needy-conference fund, which local conferences can apply to when in need of extra support.

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