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7TH Annual Valentines for Food Drive for the Crisis Ministry Sets Records In Support of Hunger Prevention: 11.7 tons of food collected, \$19,200 raised

(TRENTON)—For the seventh consecutive year, schools and congregations, McCaffrey's Supermarkets, the Rotary Club of Princeton, volunteers, and donors worked with the Crisis Ministry on behalf of neighbors in need. The food and money raised in February and March during Valentines for Food 2011 will provide 1,190 people with three days' worth of food.

"Schools and congregations more than doubled the amount of food collected over last year," said Mark Smith, the organization's Hunger Prevention Director, "and we appreciate that donors gave so many healthy foods. The donated food offsets our purchasing costs, while the money raised amounted to nearly a quarter of our food purchasing budget for this year."

Valentines for Food was established in 2005 by the late Don Dickason as a service project for the Princeton Rotary to sponsor. It has grown into a vital source of food, funds, and increased awareness throughout Mercer County about the Crisis Ministry's work to help neighbors in need to achieve food security.

"Valentines for Food is one of our most important fundraisers each year, and would not have reached this level of giving without our volunteer coordinators at the schools, congregations, and McCaffrey's," said Carolyn Biondi, the Crisis Ministry's Interim Executive Director. Margie Seitter, of Princeton, and Sharyn Kerschner, of West Windsor, who coordinated volunteer efforts at McCaffrey's Supermarkets, were joined as coordinators by many teachers and advisers, students, and parents. The Princeton Regional Schools and the West Windsor-Plainsboro school district held food and donation drives, as did the Pennington School, Princeton Junior School, Princeton Charter School, and 14 congregations. Some highlights from Valentines for Food 2011:

- The total \$19,200 raised accounts for nearly a quarter of the nonprofit organization's Hunger Prevention budget of \$80,000.
- The 1,529 bags of food collected at schools and churches weigh in at more than 11.7 tons.
- The 290 bags collected by West Windsor-Plainsboro South students included 693 items collected by just one student—Alexis Etheridge—who coordinated a neighborhood food drive.

- McCaffrey's shoppers in Princeton and West Windsor purchased 1,535 "Valentines" worth \$6,124. McCaffrey's donated an additional \$5,000.
- The food drives by all of the Princeton Regional Schools made up 40 percent of the total food collected.
- Students at John Witherspoon Middle School in Princeton donated \$3,025 in addition to the 300 bags collected during their food drive.
- Members of 14 churches in greater Mercer County donated \$5,051 and collected 350 bags of food. They are: Princeton's Trinity, Nassau Presbyterian, Witherspoon Presbyterian, Princeton United Methodist, St. Paul's, and Christ Congregation churches; Pennington's St. Matthew's and St. James churches; St. Mark United Methodist Church, Hamilton Square; Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church, West Windsor; St. David's Church, Cranbury; Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville; Trinity Church, Rocky Hill; and Princeton University Chapel.

A non-profit, 501(c) 3 program, the Crisis Ministry recently celebrated its 30th year of partnering with the community to achieve stability for neighbors in need. Founded in 1980 by Princeton's Nassau Presbyterian Church and Trinity Episcopal Church, it serves people from over 1,400 households each month who seek food or homelessness prevention assistance. The Crisis Ministry also provides workforce training through its program Harvesting Hope and, with partner Capital Health System, bimonthly health screenings hosted by Trenton's historic First Presbyterian Church.

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Photo caption: Across Mercer County, schools, churches, McCaffrey's supermarkets, and Rotary of Princeton held recent food and donation drives for the 7th annual Valentines for Food. The community-wide effort resulted in 11.7 tons of food collected and \$19,200 donated to the Crisis Ministry hunger prevention program, which serves more than 3,700 families in need each year. Pictured, Princeton High School representatives and Crisis Ministry staff members met to discuss how the drive helps families in need. Standing, from left, Alicia Morrison, Volunteer Coordinator of the Crisis Ministry; PHS senior and student coordinator Catherine Price, who presents a check for \$470 to Carolyn Biondi, Interim Executive Director of the Crisis Ministry; Daphne Jones, Steering Committee member; seated, from left, Andrea Dinan, Director of Service-Learning and Experiential Programs for Princeton Regional Schools, and sophomore Runa Ogata, who will coordinate the 2012 PHS food drive. Visit thecrisisministry.org or facebook.com/TheCrisisMinistry, or call 609-396-9355.

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