

# Christian Partners

## From Christian Appalachian Project

SUMMER 2011

### Short-term volunteers return repeatedly to CAP

**Retirement. For some people it means more time with family. Others see it as a chance to travel. Then there are the folks who incorporate both of those things through service in Appalachia.**

Before retirement, Jay and Sandra Dresser met a former CAP volunteer couple in their church in Georgia. Upon learning about CAP's mission and the Christmas basket program, Jay realized he could help. He owned a clothing store and often had clothing that didn't sell well; he began donating that clothing to CAP for Christmas baskets.



Jay retired in 2000. "We were looking for some mission work," he recalls about that time. Jay had been 15-years-old when he first felt that desire to be a missionary and that had never left him. So in September of that year, he and Sandra went to check out CAP in person.

Jay volunteered for a short while in housing; Sandra volunteered in the elderly visitation and outreach programs.

Coming from Clayton, Georgia, the mountain views and culture were familiar in many ways. "The thing that drew us is the poverty and housing is so different from where we live in southern Appalachia," Jay says. "We were also very much impressed by the employees and the long term volunteers."

Jay and Sandra followed that first volunteer stint

SHORT-TERM CONT. ON BACK ►



### FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEERS SHARE FOOD AND CHRIST'S LOVE

**CAP volunteers Dave and Kathy Rozga have both seen it when folks walk into the Grateful Bread Food Pantry in Mt. Vernon. "The people are scared or embarrassed," Dave says, adding that he and Kathy don't want people to feel that way.**

"People of poverty are not accustomed to being treated with respect," Kathy adds. She and Dave don't want to treat those who use the pantry as second class citizens by making them wait a long time and treating them as a number to get out the door. "First and foremost we get people who don't have enough food," Kathy says. "We're the Christian Appalachian Project so we want to show them the love of Christ."

That love is apparent in the bustle of a busy afternoon. Dave, who spent 34 years managing Kroger stores in Michigan, has arranged the pantry for an easy walk-through with customers. When there are two items to choose from, like two flavors of breakfast pastries, he asks them which they prefer. Before putting anything in their regular-sized shopping cart, he asks if they want the item. And if there's enough time when they finish the last rack of food, he helps them take their groceries to their car. "We treat our participants as customers," Dave says.

The couple began volunteering in October and they have seen traffic increasing. In April they provided food to 840 people, plus senior commodities to 96 seniors. As a grocery professional, Dave is accustomed to putting a dollar value per pound on food. He says a family of four typically receives about 100 pounds of food, which is worth \$2.70 per pound. "During the first three months we gave away approximately \$478,000 in food," Kathy says.

Although the wealth of the United States is visible in the houses, cars and stores that punctuate the landscape, there are pockets throughout the country where the lack of wealth means going hungry. Appalachia is certainly one of these areas. The Grateful Bread Food Pantry is

FOOD PANTRY CONT. INSIDE ►

## Missions become accessible in Appalachian Kentucky

The First Baptist Church of Geneva, Illinois had a program through which members could go out and do mission work, but many in the church didn't feel it was something they could join. The men's group, for example, traveled to Mexico on a house-building trip. Some didn't have the money to participate. Others lacked construction skills. Still others didn't feel comfortable going abroad.

Mike Wildman, a member of the church, wanted to make short-term mission experiences more accessible to adults. He searched for something not too far away, too expensive or too intimidating. When he discovered that the neighboring Christ Community Church was going to serve with CAP in Kentucky, he decided to join them. Perhaps it could yield a good opportunity for his church.

That was 2008. Although he had driven through Appalachia before on his way to Florida, Mike had never truly spent time there. What he saw when he arrived reminded him of some of what he had been exposed to in high school when his family lived on a farm in southern Illinois. He recalls a friend there who lived in a trailer; whose family went hunting for game. They didn't have a lot of possessions but what they had, they treasured. There were similarities between that and the lifestyle in the mountains.

Nancy O'Connor, who has participated in the church's trip to Kentucky each time, liked the idea of serving in the United States. "I think it's important for the church to be aware of the urgent needs right here at home," she says. "It can be a good stepping stone and a great way to start stepping out of our comfort zone to serve others."

First Baptist's annual trips to Appalachia began in the fall of 2008 and have continued annually since then. "Everybody who goes on the trip inevitably falls in love with the people and CAP," Mike says.

One of the things that attracted Nancy to the trip was that the brochure said "no construction experience necessary . . . which was perfect for my skill level (or lack thereof), and it seemed to be exactly what

I was looking for," Nancy said.

There were other things about the CAP experience that Mike also saw as ideal for his group. "I was impressed with the whole CAP organization," he remembers. The crew leaders knew what they were doing and were willing to teach the volunteers. They had materials and tools lined up so the crew could go to work rather than being delayed by waiting for what they needed. And the homeowners were happy to have them. Mike remembers some people being so grateful that they would go out of their way to prepare a meal for the volunteers.

"This is a short-term mission trip where you truly see the results of your work," Mike says. During one trip, group members completed building three handicap ramps. "It's very rewarding."

"Personally, I have loved going to Kentucky and being involved with CAP!" Nancy says. "I feel like it's something I'm supposed to be doing—that I'm right where God wants me. I've loved learning how to use power tools and it's very rewarding to provide practical assistance in this way. CAP does a wonderful job of providing assistance to the people of Appalachia and it's a pleasure to be associated with the ministry."

Mike says that association has provided an opportunity where God can work on the hearts of some of the group members to better understand the circumstances surrounding poverty. It's also built an awareness of how their lifestyle compares to some others in their own country.

"People come back realizing we're living in an affluent neighborhood. We appreciate what we have and realize the way we live isn't the way the majority of people in the U.S. live," he says.



"For me personally it's a very humbling experience," Mike says. "It's one week out of the year when I'm not a father, husband or office worker. . . I'm just willing to do whatever God calls me to do and that's a wonderful feeling."

Volunteering with CAP has helped the church make mission trips more accessible and Mike would like to see their groups grow, maybe even to volunteering twice a year. This October the group will be in Kentucky again but Mike won't be able to make it so Nancy will lead the mission. She's looking forward to the trip once again. She says: "This is the fourth trip for me and I'll keep coming back until God says 'no' or 'go somewhere else.' "

◀CONT. FROM FOOD PANTRY

located in Rockcastle County. According to 2009 U.S. Census figures, 26 percent of the families in the county live below the poverty line compared to nearly 10 percent nationally.

Dave has seen there are very few jobs available in the area. He says that because most the available jobs are minimum wage positions, "Even if they have a job they're still under the poverty level."

Larry Cowles, a former CAP volunteer who provides protein to the pantry, says, "There's no acknowledgment on the part of city and county officials that poverty is a problem here." Yet, only 50 percent or so of the population has graduated from high

# Couple farms to provide protein for pantry

When Larry and Martha Cowles completed their volunteer commitment to CAP in 2009, they knew they wanted to stay in Kentucky. Things fell into place for them when they bought a log house on an acre-and-a-half in Rockcastle County, where they served. "Larry has always loved being outdoors . . . and trying new things," Martha says.

Larry's also been interested in raising sheep for 50 years. But rather than jumping into it based on desire, Larry and Martha wanted to fill a need. "We have a sense of mission in terms of people," Martha says. "The numbers show there are hungry people so we asked: what could we do to be able to help them?"

In crafting their plan they drew on their corporate backgrounds and created a mission statement to help give them measurements for success. In the richest nation on the world, no one should go hungry. Thus, their mission is to: provide, through the raising and distribution of beef, lamb, eggs and fowl, protein for low income families residing in Rockcastle County, distributed through existing food banks in and around Mount Vernon, Kentucky.

With their mission in mind, the Cowles began raising chickens. In the fall they will have 100 hens and their goal is to provide 27 percent of the eggs needed at the Grateful Bread Food Pantry, operated by CAP in Mt. Vernon. Presently they are providing the pantry with 40 dozen eggs a month.

As the mission statement demonstrates, they didn't plan to stop with chickens. When more land became available, they incorporated it into their operations so they could also raise sheep. Beside the fact that Larry wanted to raise sheep, he says the space needed for each sheep make them a better use of the land. "You can do six sheep to one cow," he says.

Martha is pleased with the choice. "I personally am a lot more comfortable working with a sheep than wrestling a cow," she says.

Because of his long interest in raising sheep, Larry says, "I've been doing my homework for a number of years." He began with a



base of knowledge then searched for other resources to help him learn. Because of predators, fencing is a major issue when raising sheep. That has required an investment of time and money.

Larry and Martha have learned from mistakes they've made in their "on-the-job" training, but they're pleased with their progress. Since they aren't raising cows or pigs themselves, they've created partnerships with other farmers who will sell them their cull animals. They then have the meat processed and donate it to the Grateful Bread Food Pantry. So far this year they've provided 1500 pounds of ground beef and sausage. In the process they've discovered that other farmers and the butchers share their sense of mission and their belief that no one should go hungry.

"I'm overwhelmed by the number of people we meet who have never done this before," Larry says. He encourages other farmers to make a similar contribution to their local food economy.

One of the reasons this is possible for them in Mt. Vernon is because they've seen the way CAP's food pantry works and they have faith in that food distribution system. Now it's a system that they, too, are a part of.

school, limiting the employers who would hire them.

As they continue to get to know the local culture, Dave and Kathy sometimes compare it to the poverty they saw in Michigan where they volunteered with a mobile food pantry. They say the cars people drove to that pantry, as well as the numbers it served, demonstrate that the level of poverty there was much less than what they see in Appalachia.

Kathy also sees cultural differences. For example, one woman who uses the pantry is raising her grandson. She also took in her grandson's friend because he had no place to go. Kathy says it's not unusual to see people open their home to family members or someone else who is in need, even if

they don't have much themselves.

The food the pantry gives out comes from a variety of sources such as God's Pantry, Big Lots, an area bakery, donations and food CAP purchases. Kathy points out that groups from Tennessee and Ohio have donated thousands of pounds of food and other groups have sponsored food drives. These food drives help raise awareness and provide a way for people to get involved. "Each donation is received as a treasured



gift, one more step in helping to relieve poverty in Rockcastle County," Kathy says.

Kathy sees one of the benefits of the pantry is relieving the burden of a family to spend the little money they have, if they have any, on food. She reminds them the pantry can free up some of that money so they can pay their utility, rent or other bills.

Still, Kathy says she doesn't think they are reaching everyone who is hungry. Forty new families used the pantry in April. So the welcoming, the shopping and the good cheer continue as this volunteer couple seeks to feed their customers with food and love.

◀CONT. FROM SHORT-TERM

with returning for WorkFest in 2001. During WorkFest, college students on spring break spend a week serving in CAP's housing program where they repair roofs, windows, porches, build wheelchair ramps, stairs, etc. CAP considers the situation of the family when assessing housing projects for WorkFest. The goal is to make the homes more livable.

Jay was a natural for the job in many ways. Through the years he had volunteered in construction during hurricane relief in the south. Doing that sort of service requires not only building skills but also the ability to motivate and teach a crew of people who often have no building experience. "I consider my job as a crew leader to teach," he says.

To do that he breaks crews into small groups that work on specific tasks. He teaches them the skills they need. He also uses his time driving to the worksite to help the students learn about the region's culture, pointing out spring houses, black barns, tobacco stalks and more. He explains their significance, hoping the students are growing from their experiences.

Sandra sees a different side of the students. As a college home economics major, she's been able to put her talents to use in the kitchen. "The cooking came naturally so that's what I've always done at WorkFest," she says.

Sandra sees the young people moving out of their comfort zone during their WorkFest experience to help the families they meet as they build friendships and teamwork with students from other colleges. "I think it has made us appreciate the young people of today," she says.

Sometimes it's seemingly easier tasks that stretch the students. During the week they are assigned to help with cleaning the facility where they stay. Sandra remembers one young woman who had to clean the bathroom, which she had never before done. Sandra had her own opportunity to teach. "It's an experience in communal living as well as working with the families," she says.

Although Jay and Sandra feel driven to help people, they see a different attitude toward service in today's young people than

they saw in his generation. These people are willing to shake up their own comfort as they face the reality of poverty. He credits CAP's founder, Father Beiting, with establishing an organization and culture in which that sort of volunteer work thrives. "Father Beiting's legacy is in his ability to create volunteers who will step up and really do the work," Jay says, noting how people truly put their whole heart and soul into the families they meet.

That's one of the things that has drawn Jay and Sandra back to eastern Kentucky repeatedly for short-term volunteering. They see that in the CAP staff as well as the volunteers, all of whom have become part of their extended family. They point out that with that dedication, CAP fills gaps in the region by providing services others don't, such as elderly visitation and respite care for families whose children have a disability.

CAP couldn't do that without donations of time and money. "CAP should be commended for the use of donations," Jay says. He has seen both used well and he has observed the results they bring.

Jay still remembers working on a trailer for a family in Jackson County. He noticed the children got off the bus down the road instead of in front of their trailer. Why? The family was embarrassed about the way their home looked. Jay made sure his group improved the front of their house. When it was finished, the children got off the bus right in front of their home.

Sandra recalls another man who planted corn in front of his house so no one could see it. After the improvements to his home, he said he planned to move his garden.

Jay points out the enormous result a small improvement on a home can have on a person's outlook about him or herself.

"I get more blessings out of it than anyone else does," he says after recalling these stories. Sometimes the folks whose home is being repaired make the effort to provide lunch to the crew even when it's a financial burden, something that makes Jay feel his contribution is small. "You know they're giving from their heart when they do that."



## CONTACT US:

1-800-755-5322

christianpartners@chrisapp.org  
www.christianapp.org

CHRISTIAN APPALACHIAN PROJECT  
CHRISTIAN PARTNERS  
4192 NORTH WILDERNESS ROAD  
MT. VERNON, KY 40456