

Low Income Families Unable To Meet Energy Cost

Turning up the thermostat as the mercury hovered around the 20s meant an increased cost for utilities which many low-income families will not be able to meet.

Low-income families may be caught in financial trouble due to the recent cold temperatures. A low of 7° was reported to the National Weather Service from Duplin County during the Christmas cold snap.

Holidays began on Christmas Eve with temperatures dropping to 7° and reaching a high on Christmas Day of 28° in Duplin. High and low temperatures are reported daily by C.M. Outlaw of Route 2, Warsaw to the National Weather Service. And, through the record-setting cold temperatures, Duplin County Emergency Services reported a very quiet holiday season answering no calls due to the extreme cold.

"People are becoming more heat related crisis aware," said Director of Duplin County Social Services Millie Brown. According to Brown, the Social Services Department in Duplin sees two or more families daily with heat-related crisis.

Three programs provide low-income families with energy related financial assistance at the Duplin Social Services office. A federally funded program for heat assistance is the Crisis Intervention program and applications are currently being accepted at Duplin

Social Services. Duplin has \$25,000 allotted in the Crisis Intervention funds for low-income families to use in purchasing heating fuel, paying electrical expenses in homes heated by electricity, and buying heaters and bed covers such as blankets, Brown said.

The Low Income Energy Assistance program is not currently taking applications, Brown said. Applications for the program ended November 30 and funds should arrive during the first week of February.

A third program for energy assistance is privately funded by Carolina Power and Light and their employees. According to Brown, CP&L matches their employees' contributions to the fund. Applicants are often referred by CP&L but Brown said interested families can inquire about the fund at the Social Services office.

"We still have some crisis intervention funds," Brown said. "And, there has not been much difference in the number of people requesting assistance since Christmas." The maximum funds available to families through the Crisis Intervention program is \$200. Heat-related financial problems are one of the major costs facing low-income families each year, Brown said.

Aged and handicapped individuals may qualify for assistance through the emergency fuel fund at the Duplin Services for the Aged. However, Duplin Director of the Services for the Aged Walter Brown said the emergency fuel fund is only used in extreme circumstances. Most of the needy aged and handicapped individuals at the Duplin Services to the Aged are referred to the Energy and Weatherization Service of Du-Penza in Rose Hill. Du-Penza works with individuals to winterize homes, Brown said.

Vegetable Growers' School

The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service will be sponsoring an area vegetable school at Carolina Parbeque in Jacksonville on Jan. 6 with displays opening up at 9 a.m. and educational programs beginning at 10 a.m.

The morning program will cover topics such as Contracting A Seller for Vegetables, Mechanical Harvesting of Beans, and Drip Irrigation for Vegetables. After lunch there will be a session on having a Steady Supply of Sweet Corn for Market and the Nuts and Bolts of Plastic Culture for Sweet Corn, Cantaloupe, Okra and Tomatoes.

For more information, and if you plan to attend, contact Philip J. Denlinger, Duplin County assistant agricultural extension agent. The phone number is 296-1996.

Attention

The Town of Magnolia is now offering a Community Watch Service to Magnolia citizens who are elderly, handicapped and/or live alone. Check by the Magnolia Town Hall for more information and to sign up for the Watch Service. You may call the Magnolia Town Hall at 289-3205, according to Kathryn G. Pope, Town Clerk.

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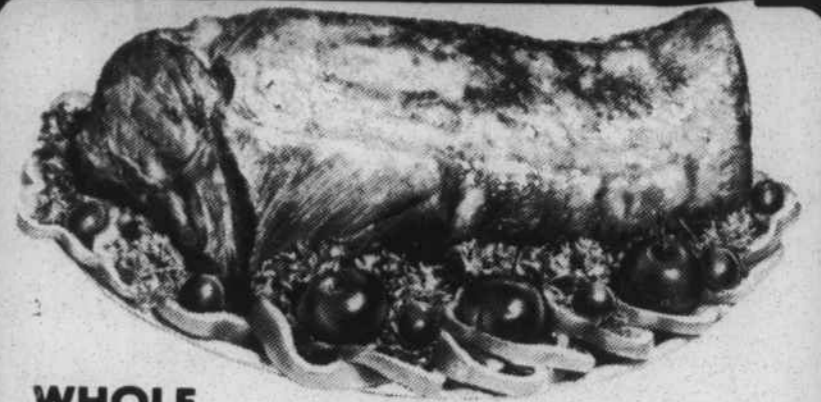
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