

## Martha's Mission

Like most successful efforts, it started with one inspired person, Hannah Dexter. As Christmas was approaching in 1979, Ms. Dexter, a member of the United Methodist Church in Morehead City, was looking for a way women in her parish could help the needy. After consulting with several local charities and with her pastor, Rufus Stark, Ms. Dexter requested and received from the county's Department of Social Services names of 40 families. The women of the church visited these families to assess needs and prepared boxes of food, clothes and other gifts for them.

The holiday passed, but Ms. Dexter knew the needs would be as great after Christmas as they were before. She encouraged her parish to continue visiting these 40 families and to provide assistance as necessary. Over the next two years, the Christmas outreach program grew, and United Methodist Church also continued to assist families needing help throughout the year. There were referrals from Beacon House, Helpline, Community Action and the Department of Social Services.

In 1982, to avoid a duplication of efforts, other churches (First Presbyterian Church, St. Egbert Catholic Church, First Baptist Church and Shepherd by the Sea Lutheran Church) joined United Methodist Church in supplying basic necessities to needy families throughout the year. They did not have a stock of supplies, but church members always responded when there was a request for food, so the ongoing program became known as Mother Hubbard's Cupboard.

By 1984, more churches and civic groups had become involved. The entire effort began to expand and was in need of a fixed location where food could be stored and distributed. Paul and Jim Johnson, owners of a Western Steer Steak House that was on Bridges Street offered a back dining room as a site for distributing food. They also provided storage space for stocking items.

And so, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard was no longer bare and became Martha's Mission Cupboard, the reference being to the hospitable Martha of the New Testament. Betty Holloway became the Mission Cupboard's first director. It started out with fifty-five volunteers. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. and on Tuesday and Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m., they distributed food to families who were required, then as now, to bring referral slips from the Department of Social Services.

Seven churches were involved at this time. In addition to the five mentioned above, there were St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and Parkview Baptist. A Board of Directors was formed with a member of each church represented.

To ensure a balanced stock of canned goods and dry goods, each church was responsible for donating specific food items. Money donations went to purchase additional items. There were also donations from individuals and other organizations. Soon, Martha's Mission Cupboard required more storage space, and a new freestanding storage building was installed at the back of the Western Steer parking lot.

By 1986, Martha's Mission Cupboard was on solid footing. Area churches created the ecumenical organization Bogue Banks Resort Ministries, which began to provide regular funding for a variety of charities including Martha's Mission Cupboard. However, the Cupboard continued to operate independently under its own Board of Directors with Betty Holloway as director.

After only two years, Martha's Mission Cupboard had earned bragging rights for its good work. It was one of the county's and the state's outstanding volunteer organizations. On October 10,

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1986, Betty Holloway, accepted the Governor's Award on behalf of Martha's Mission.

But, the following year was to be a bumpy one. In 1987, a red tide was beginning to affect local shellfish, jeopardizing the livelihood of Carteret County's fishing community. More families than ever before were being referred to the Mission Cupboard for assistance. The Western Steer Restaurant could no longer provide space, and Betty Holloway stepped down as director.

Fortunately, St. Egbert's Catholic Church offered Martha's Mission Cupboard one of its buildings. Lillian Webster and Sarah Hamilton stepped up to serve as co-directors on an interim basis until October 1987, when Jenny Horne accepted the role of director.

In 1988, economic conditions worsened as the red tide continued. Martha's Mission Cupboard served 15,532 people that year, dramatically more than it served any year before or since.

To those involved, it seemed a miraculous achievement. Donations soared, as did the numbers of volunteers. For example, 40,000 pounds of food, bought largely with money from the Southern Baptist Convention, came in from a Raleigh food bank, and about 100 volunteers arrived to unload these donations. Helig Meyers Furniture donated a freezer. Capt. Bill's Restaurant, the Armory in Morehead City and Quick Freeze in Beaufort provided additional space for storing food. Other money and food donations large and small from individuals, civic organizations, businesses and churches combined to keep the Cupboard opened and distributing food for extended hours, Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bogue Banks Resort Ministries provided \$3,000 a month in support. The slogan "neighbor helping neighbor" became the reality of day-to-day operations at Martha's Mission Cupboard.

Though everyone involved was grateful for the space St. Egbert's Church was providing, it became clear in 1988 that a more permanent home was highly desirable. First Baptist Church of Morehead City had property on the corner of 9th and Bay streets that it was willing to make available. A plan developed to use this land to build a structure specifically for Martha's Mission Cupboard.

The First Baptist Church would make a permanent, stand-alone facility possible by retaining ownership of the property, leasing the building to Martha's Mission Cupboard for \$1.00 per year and providing for maintenance, utilities and insurance—an arrangement that remains in effect to the present day. However, Martha's Mission Cupboard, which incorporated as a non-denominational non-profit organization on April 3, 1988, had to build its own building.

The Board of Directors estimated it needed to raise \$26,000 to begin construction on a 24' x 48' building. Organized fundraisers began. By August 7, 1988, although the board was considerably short of its dollar goal, enough money, material, time and talent were donated to hold a groundbreaking ceremony and begin construction—a feat accomplished once again through the community's generosity, dedication and spirit of volunteerism. For example, David Stull, a contractor, donated his time; building suppliers and individuals across the county donated materials and labor.

Since December 5, 1988, without interruption, Martha's Mission Cupboard has distributed food from this Bay Street building. Jenny Horne remained as director until January 1990. In March

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