

Thanksgiving Served For 70 Families

[By Shannon Hicks](#)



Middle Gate Elementary School students, from right, Mary Sortino, Sean Gordon, and Claudia Sorrentino helped load food collected at their school for Women Involved in Newtown's Thanksgiving Baskets program on Friday, November 18. A number of schools helped WIN with their annual holiday program.

Thanks to the efforts of families, clubs, school groups, and organizations, all coordinated by Women Involved in Newtown, 70 families will have a full Thanksgiving feast this week.

On Friday, November 18, as they had been doing for more than half a century, said Mandy Monaco, one of the program's co-chairs, WIN members and additional volunteers spent their day receiving, organizing, and then handing out donations that will help families have a full Thanksgiving dinner. The Thanksgiving Baskets program, a townwide drive, also provides local families enough food to last into the holiday season.

The program is done through Newtown Social Services. Families, individuals, and couples who apply to Social Services to be part of the program are assigned a number, which is then used as the only

identifying marker between Social Services and WIN. When families are "adopted" by those who want to help with donations of food and other items, the donors are only told the number of their adopted person(s) and general identifying characteristics (male, female, general age range, etc). Never does the name of a family leave the Social Services files.

Canned food drives were done this year at a number of locations, including Newtown Middle School, Middle Gate Elementary School, Reed Intermediate School, and Sandy Hook School.

"The Masons also joined the effort this year," said Mrs Monaco. The first thing that needs to be done once food donations are dropped off is to check for expiration dates. A handful of volunteers spent much of their day last Friday doing just that. "We have to," said Mandy Monaco. "We need to make sure we aren't passing along bad food to anyone."

There is an unofficial contest held each year among those who sort the food, to see who finds the oldest expiration date on donated items. Renee Gliniecki won the dubious honor this year when she unearthed something that had expired in 2003.

It is a long day for WIN members and their volunteers. Setup in the church hall begins by 9 am, most families pick up their donations between 5 and 7 pm (a handful, those who cannot get out of their homes, receive deliveries thanks to local Scouts), and then cleanup is finished by 8 or 9 pm, said Cyndy DaSilva, who has co-chaired the WIN side of the baskets program with Mrs Monaco for a number of years.

Local restaurants help feed the volunteers who spent their day coordinating efforts to make sure others were fed. Whether they stopped in for ten minutes or any of the 12 hours the donations were being received and sorted, plenty of food was made available thanks to Bagel Delight, My Place Restaurant, and Stone River Grille.

In previous years the Thanksgiving Basket Program has helped feed a larger number of families. Last year the program responded requests from more than 80 families, and a few years ago more than 100 names were on the list of those who asked for a hand filling their cabinets.

"I'm not sure why we're lower this year," said volunteer Renee Gliniecki, "unless maybe people have moved away because they can't afford to stay here."