

Kids Summer Stock launches series of regional food drives at Sunday in the Park concert

By [Kathryn Kennedy](#)
The Daily Reflector

Monday, June 23, 2008

It's been a tough year for people in the business of helping others.

At the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, staffers have watched a drought eliminate over one million pounds of produce from their stores. The diesel used to fuel their fleet of 22 trucks has climbed from \$2.65 to almost \$5 per gallon. Meanwhile, need has increased statewide by as much as 40 percent.

"Everyone's seeing an increase in demand," said the food bank's President Peter Werbicki, who has been with the organization 11 years. "Outside of natural disasters, I have never known demand for our services as high."

So they've launched a new campaign. Kids Summer Stock, a series of regional food drive events, stopped by the Town Common during Sunday in the Park. Around 50,000 children receiving either free or reduced lunch are out on summer break now, said Christy Simmons, public relations manager. And though some will be fed as part of camps and enrichment programs, many aren't.

"It seems like the nutritional value of some of the meals are poor and over the summer they don't even get that," said Sheawanna Anderson, a first grade teacher at Farmville's H.B. Sugg Elementary School who volunteers with the food bank.

Anderson says she sees the effects of poverty on students everyday.

"We do this activity in my class asking 'What did you eat for dinner last night? Where does it fit in the food pyramid?' And they don't know because it's ramen noodles or grilled cheese. I ask how many had a green vegetable last night and see only a few hands."

A large crowd turned out to aid those children in need while listening to the Summer Pops Orchestra perform classical pieces by Mozart and French composer Gabriel Faure.

Along with lawn chairs and blankets, attendees toted sagging plastic grocery bags, heavy with canned goods. Some handed dollar bills to the volunteers standing at multiple entrances. This kind of generosity, Simmons said, is commonplace among Greenville-area residents.

"People on vacation are just not thinking about hunger," she said. "People are more charitable during the holidays and then it tapers off...This is just to say 'Hey guys, we're still here.'"

"They always answer the call and they came out in full tonight."

Now that they've been reminded that the need exists year-round, Simmons said she hopes residents will step up by hosting food drives within their civic groups, businesses or churches.

"Events like these and having people understand what the food bank does are critical," Werbicki said. "At the Greenville branch, we'd like to see more community support."

This is the first year of the Kids Summer Stock program, Simmons said, so they came in largely without goals. The tour will serve as a benchmark for future years. The amount of goods raised won't be totaled until later today, but she called it a "very successful" event and was encouraged by the response.

"We're not going to stop the fight," she said, firmly. "Food is a basic need for every one of us."

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