

Vacationers help feed locals

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Admit it. You've complained about them, too. Vacationers. They come in droves this time of year. We blame them for the traffic and the crowds.

But, what may come as a surprise to locals is these vacationers have donated close to 150,000 pounds of food to our fellow residents in need -- the weight of the Space Shuttle Endeavor. And that's just in Holden Beach.

"We get steaks, Alaska king crab legs, we get the good stuff. The other day we got a leg of lamb," said Bill Spier, a vacationer himself (he and wife Phyllis of Charlotte own a vacation home in Holden Beach). Ten summers ago, Spier started "A Second Helping," a ministry that collects unused, leftover food from vacationers as they check out of their beach rentals. The food is then used to feed the hungry.

With an estimated 700 rental units turning over every Saturday morning in Holden Beach during the summer, it's a win-win concept that's caught on. This summer, many more area beach communities are doing the same thing, perhaps inspired by Second Helping.

"Anyone who goes on vacation and gets a condo knows they always end up with too much and rather than take it back home, they like to have a place to leave it," said Spier.

Emerald Isle opened a Second Helping branch last summer.

Wrightsville Beach collects vacationer leftovers at Little Chapel on the Boardwalk. Their program is called 2nd LOAF.

Carolina Beach Presbyterian Church has collected vacationer food in the past, and at Topsail Island, they launched Friends Feeding Friends or "F3" last summer.

"People are so appreciative to have the opportunity to leave food knowing it will go to a worthy cause. I can't tell you how many have said I couldn't stand the thought of throwing this away, I'm so glad you are here," said Julia Sherron of Friends Feeding Friends. That group has 25 volunteers and more than a dozen local businesses pitching in. This summer they've increased in volume, bringing in 250 to 300 pounds of food per weekend.

All of the ministries have designated drop off locations for vacationers to bring their unused groceries from mid-June through Labor Day weekend. Local residents also pitch in by donating both food and money.

Real estate people have helped get the word out by putting flyers in the rental folders or magnets on the beach rental refrigerators with drop off location information.



Bill Spier, who founded the Second Helping collection program at Holden Beach, shows what a typical Saturday morning brings in from vacationers. Photo courtesy of Second Helping

Perishable food is brought the same day to families in need. Non-perishable foods are donated to the neighborhood food pantries and soup kitchens.

“Last week this guy rode up and said, 'Do you take baby food?' He brought us three bags full of baby food. We were so grateful because a lot of times it's young families who are the ones struggling,” said Sherron.

After 10 years, A Second Helping in Holden Beach today brings in an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 pounds of food per week, 15,000 to 20,000 pounds per summer and proudly posts on their website their 10-year total of close to 150,000 pounds.

“People like to now how much food we collect. They are always amazed that much food would have gone to waste if we didn't collect it. That's a lot of food that will feed a lot of people,” said Spier.

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