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PD Editorial: Helping hand

A generous community can help feed struggling neighbors

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For many, Thursday will play out in traditional ways, with turkey, stuffing and conversation about people and things for which we're thankful.

But there's no hiding the fact that, given the state of the economy, the ranks of those less fortunate have swelled in recent months.

In anticipation that someone at your Thanksgiving celebration may raise the question about how and where to help those in our community who are struggling, here's a list of some of the many local organizations dedicated to helping.

As noted below, these groups could use your time, turkeys or, perhaps better yet, a contribution to help pay for the services they offer:

The Redwood Gospel Mission will host a Thanksgiving dinner for 5,000 people later today, then gear up to do it again at Christmas. You can donate online at srmission.org, bring a turkey to the mission, at 101 Sixth St. in Santa Rosa or call 578-1830. (As of late Tuesday, they were still in need of turkeys for today.)

The Redwood Empire Food Bank supplies soup kitchens and food pantries throughout the region. Send contributions to 3320 Industrial Drive, Santa Rosa 95403 or call 523-7900.

The Committee on the Shelterless provides shelter, transitional housing and training and serves 100,000 meals and distributes 500,000 pounds of food annually. You can donate online or see a wish list and volunteer opportunities at cots-homeless.org, or send a donation to COTS, P.O. Box 2744, Petaluma 94953.

Food for Thought, a Forestville-based food pantry, serves AIDS and HIV patients. Donate online at fftfoodbank.org. To volunteer, e-mail volunteer@fftfoodbank.org or call 887-1647.

The Family Support Center is a shelter for homeless families. Services include medical screenings and employment and housing counseling. Donate online at srcharities.org, send contributions to Catholic Charities, P.O. Box 4900, Santa Rosa 95402 or call 528-8712, ext. 160.

The Council on Aging delivers more than 250,000 meals annually to senior citizens and provides social, financial and legal services. You can volunteer or donate at

councilonaging.com. Send donations to 30 Kawana Springs Road, Santa Rosa 95404 or call 525-0143.

The needs are great, especially this year.

"We're bracing ourselves for the same thing we've been seeing over the past quarter -- at least a 25 percent increase in need," Betsy Timm of Catholic Charities of Santa Rosa told Staff Writer R.R. Wolfe recently.

Some charities are reporting a decline in giving, among them the Salvation Army, which is closing two of its North Bay thrift stores. Despite the tough times, many people remain eager to help. "It is not uncommon for us to receive notes with donations thanking us for the opportunity to give," Timm said.

Our list is just a small sample of the worthy charities in our community. You can find others through the Volunteer Center, the Community Foundation of Sonoma County and online services such as

guidestar.org and giveusa.org.

If you want to draw attention to a favorite charity this holiday season, post a comment on this editorial at pressdemocrat.com/opinion.

Remember, even a small donation can go a long way -- and these organizations welcome your help throughout the year.
