

Alfred University Food Pantry fills need on campus and in local community

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Charlie Best (left) and Uma Samudrala, student interns working at the Alfred University Food Pantry.

ALFRED, NY Think of places that have a need for food pantries and college campuses may be one of the last that come to mind. Unfortunately for some of today's college students, hunger is a problem they cope with regularly.

"It's a sad reality that students come to us in a needy financial situation," said Kathy Woughter, vice president of Student Affairs at Alfred University. "In some cases, students have to make a choice between buying food and buying books."

Thanks to a gift from an Alfred University alumnus, relief for students in need is available. A food pantry, funded by financial contributions from Larry Sell of Hornell, a 1972 Alfred University graduate, opened Saturday, Oct. 21, on the Alfred campus. Woughter said the pantry will initially distribute food once a month, with hopes it will expand to be open more frequently in the future.

The need for food pantries on college campuses (private and public) is evident, Woughter said, pointing to a study of emergency aid programs done by the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. According to the study, 28 percent of private four-year institutions and 55 percent of public four-year institutions have food pantries or some other type of emergency food aid program.

"Students are coming in, even at private schools, in a much needier position than people would think," Woughter said. She explained that students living on campus are required to have a meal plan, but can petition for a waiver of that requirement. "They reason that the meal plan is too expensive, but then they don't have money to buy food. You get a group of students who really struggle."

While studying art at Alfred in the early 70s, Sell was one of the students Woughter was describing -- limited in means and struggling to get by.

Sell said he was 22 when he enrolled at Alfred and while he worked every day to support his educational endeavors, he eventually mulled leaving school over financial hardships. He learned about a student loan fund, from which he could borrow enough to cover day-to-day expenses, like purchasing food.

"It allowed me to stay in school," said Sell, who earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Alfred University in 1972. He has been an entrepreneur, living in Hornell, conducting estate appraisals and dealing in rare memorabilia, including autographs and manuscripts, postal covers, documents and photographs.

“This is my way of giving back,” Sell said of his gift to the University. “Everything we are is what others have helped us to become. I’ve had lots of mentors in my life, and some pretty significant ones at Alfred.”

Sell’s gift will cover start-up expenses shelving and storage equipment for the pantry location at the Judson Leadership Center, corner of Ford and Sayles streets as well as funding two student intern positions. The interns -- senior Charlie Best of Alden, NY, and first-year Uma Samudrala of Youngstown, NY (both art and design majors) -- have written policies and procedures for the pantry; are recruiting and supervising volunteers; and setting up food collection sites on campus.

Initially, the pantry is collecting only non-perishable items, with fresh food like produce being purchased the day of distribution. The Alfred University Food Pantry will acquire some food from Foodlink, an organization that supplies food pantries in the Greater Rochester area and rural surrounding counties, including Allegany. “We can purchase food from (Foodlink) at a low cost, and get fresh items like produce the day of,” Woughter explained.

Organizers began collecting food the week of Oct. 16 at the main pantry location in Judson Leadership Center and also at collection bins set up throughout campus: at McLane Center; the biology department at the Science Center; and the Center for Student Involvement, Powell Campus Center. Additional collection sites are being considered.

The Alfred University Food Pantry will benefit not only Alfred students, but all needy members of the local community. The on-campus operation is meant to complement existing food pantries in Alfred, Almond, Hornell, Wellsville and other surrounding communities.

Woughter noted that the food pantry will attempt to be as “culturally sensitive” as possible, knowing that people of different backgrounds have different needs. “And we want to be able to provide people with at least enough food to make a complete meal,” she said.

Future dates and times of operation of the Alfred University Food Pantry will be announced as they are scheduled. In addition to non-perishable food items (including gluten-free items), pantry organizers are seeking donations of personal care products.

To volunteer at the Alfred University Food Pantry, complete this [on-line form](#). Volunteer work includes picking up donated items, distributing fliers, and assisting with the disbursement of food items on days the pantry is open.

Sell said he hopes others will step up and provide support to the food pantry.

“I’d like to see the program grow,” he said. “We need others alumni and friends of the University to step forward and add funding to keep it going.”

Anyone wishing to provide financial support for the food pantry should contact Kathy Woughter by phone at 607-871-2132 or by email at woughter@alfred.edu.