Just a few months ago, that Thurston County Food Bank shopper—the one in the blue sweater putting a yellow box of pasta into her bag—may have been donating a box of macaroni and cheese.

That’s something Robert Coit, executive director of the food bank, expects to see more frequently if unemployment rates continue to rise in the southwestern Washington county.

“From 2007 to 2008, we had a 30 percent increase in traffic,” says Coit, who is a member of the Waterfront Kiwanis Club, Olympia, Washington. “Already (in April), we’ve experienced another 22 percent increase, and it’s going to get worse.”

Many former donors are now laid off. So people contribute less food and money. Adding to the food bank’s predicament is a change in the way grocery stores get rid of surplus foods. Instead of donating nearly expired items, they resell food to discount markets.

But the Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) has a reliable, long-time partner to fill the gap.

Since 1992, the Kiwanis Club of Olympia, Washington, has been growing and donating an average of 14,000 pounds of fresh, organic produce every year. This past April 4—Kiwanis One Day—
Kiwanis vegetables give Thurston County Food Bank Produce Manager Sarah Swanson opportunities to schedule cooking demonstrations—complete with recipes—to help families prepare nutritious meals. For sample recipes, visit www.kiwanis.org/centerstage.
the Kiwanians and an army of other volunteers spread fertilizer, tilled soil, hoed rows, erected bean poles, turned compost and planted potatoes in the club’s three-quarter-acre plot. (They also split and stacked firewood; you’ll find that story and more at www.kiwanis.org/centerstage.)

Across town, Food Bank Garden Committee Chairman Don Leaf worked with a crew of North Thurston, Lacey Kiwanians and area Key Club members to establish a new garden at Vista Village, a condominium community east of Olympia.

Like the TCFB, which has extended its reach by setting up satellite pantries around the county and assisting independent food banks, the Olympia Kiwanians are breaking ground on three more gardens and serving as consultants for other groups.

“Right now, we supply about 70 percent of the food bank’s fresh produce. It’s a veritable farmers market in here when the Kiwanis produce comes in. There’s plenty for everyone.”

—Robert Coit, executive director, Thurston County Food Bank
“It’s going to use summer and fall produce,” says Derek Valley, chairman of the Olympia club’s One Day committee. “We wouldn’t mind seeing that percentage go down. It wouldn’t mean we’re giving less; it would mean other people are giving more.”

To assist other growers, TCFB Produce Manager Sarah Swanson created the Produce Growers Guide, a four-page pamphlet packed with information about how to set up a produce garden, what types of crops the food bank needs, what it doesn’t need (please, no pumpkins) and how to deliver the produce.

“We took this information directly from our experiences with the Olympia Kiwanis Club,” reports Swanson, who also creates recipes to help families use the Kiwanians’ vegetables.

Kiwanis One Day was just one day in the garden project. As spring progresses into summer, there will be more vegetables to plant, weeds to pull, fellow gardeners to help, potatoes to harvest and food bank deliveries to make.

Then, that shopper in the blue sweater can put healthy choices in her cart—green spinach, red radishes and orange carrots—right next to the yellow box of macaroni and cheese.

**CENTER STAGE**

Kiwanis One Day was a busy day for Washington Kiwanians. Read about their firewood project and view more photos at www.kiwanis.org/centerstage.

See what other clubs were up to at www.KiwanisOne.org/oneday.