

PRIDE OF SAFFORD NOMINATION

The Pride of Safford is proud to honor the achievements of the dedicated volunteers, GCICA board members and the managers of Our Neighbors Farm and Our Neighbors Pantry. The Graham County Interfaith Care Alliance is doing wonderful things to assist those living in poverty to have healthy food to place on the table.

Combine energetic people with a vision and entities that can assist in making the vision a reality and you have the Graham County Interfaith Care Alliance! In 2005 representatives from assorted Gila Valley churches wanted to address the homeless and in particular providing food for the homeless. The offshoot of this discussion was the formation of **THE GRAHAM COUNTY INTERFAITH CARE ALLIANCE (GCICA)** as a 501©3 non profit organization. Realizing the needs for adequate nutrition reached far beyond the homeless the coalition started a food bank known as **Our Neighbors Pantry**. The pantry is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Their goal is to serve residents of Safford and Solomon living in poverty. Other food banks address needs in other areas of Graham County. Initially when they started the pantry in 2008 they served 60 families monthly. Much of the food they provide through their FEEDING AMERICA program is donated by Basha's, Safeway and Wal-Mart. In addition the pantry distributes commodities once a month from the Community Food Bank of Tucson. Currently they serve approximately 550 local families each month.

As the INTERFAITH COUNCIL evaluated their program the need to provide additional healthy vegetables for their clients was apparent. This discussion lead to the formation of **OUR NEIGHBOR'S FARM**. The farm is a 1.3 plot of land owned by the Safford First United Methodist Church and was made available to GCICA. Hank Slotnick was the initial grant writer launching the formation of the farm. He utilized the expertise of his son who has been involved in a similar adventure in Montana. Hank wrote grants and sought assistance from Valley merchants. Freeport McMoRan through their granting process supplied \$60,000 and Graham County United Way chipped in with another \$35,000. Home Depot built a ramada utilized for tending to seedlings and educational programs while Safford Builders provided the materials for a storage shed to house equipment and the nPhuric fertilization system. The Graham County Leadership class built a second ramada adjacent to the food bank to provide shade and a gathering place for those receiving services from the pantry.

Simultaneous hiring's of Sherry Clixby as food bank manager and Max Crain as farm manager brought two knowledgeable and energetic individuals to the Valley. They coordinate the usage of produce grown by the farm and distributed to food bank recipients. For the three months of April, May and June of 2013 the farm provided 4126 pounds of fresh vegetables for distribution though the food bank. Developing and improving soil is a slow process and the food being produced is achieved on only one-third of the acreage available.

Education is an integral part of the GCICA program. The pantry provides training session from time to time to educate food bank recipients of numerous ways to prepare foods such as eggplant. In addition the farm partners with Lafe Nelson and Ruth Powell schools to assist young students to learn more about planting seeds, nurturing them and eventually harvesting. The school and the farm are equally pleased with this component.

Dedicated volunteers serve the on GCICA board to ensure the farm and pantry meet or surpass the collations mission of feeding those living in poverty. To learn more about the GCICA as well as Our Neighbor's Pantry and Our Neighbors Farm contact any of these dedicated GCICA board members: Mike Assum-president, Carl Vessels-vice president, Sherry Brady-secretary, Anne Hinton-treasurer and board members Ron Lowery, Stephanie Poor, Bonnie Dalzine, Hank Slotnick, Bob Perssan, Bill Brandau, Barbara Haralson, Jim Wright, Max Crain and Sherry Clixby.

To learn more or to volunteer for Our Neighbor's Panty call Sherry Clixby at 443-975-6526 or call Max Crain at 443-975-6527 to learn more about the farm or to volunteer. Both entities appreciate those that volunteer as these are labor intensive projects and additional volunteers would be extremely helpful. The Pride of Safford Committee is proud to recognize GCICA and the work they are doing to help the multitude of local citizens that deeply appreciate the assistance rendered.