



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Lisa Baumert, Linda Lovelace and Diana Campbell pack grocery bags with the supplies they have on hand at Valley Churches United Missions' Ben Lomond office Tuesday.

Nonprofit fears it will come up empty in campaign to feed needy area families

Food Banks

By **JONDI GUMZ**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The numbers tell the story.

About 700 needy families have asked for Thanksgiving dinner ingredients, but only 60 bags of groceries are on hand at Valley Churches United Missions, which is supposed to deliver the food Sunday.

BEN LOMOND

"We're in a pickle here," Annette Marcum, director of Valley Churches United, said Tuesday.

"We hope and pray a miracle will take place, and once again our community will come forward," added assistant director Linda Lovelace.

The nonprofit organization is struggling with a sputtering economy and a community that has been generous to relief efforts for victims of terrorist attacks on the East Coast.

Past donors are themselves in need this year.

Frank Mongetta of Bruno's Barbecue Restaurant in Scotts Valley, who put on a fund-raising feast for Valley Churches last

year, was hospitalized after doctors found two brain tumors. The tumors have been removed, but he faces a challenging recovery.

Marcum sent him get-well wishes and told family members to "come to us" if the need arises.

Another local business, Joe's Bar of Boulder Creek, provided pumpkin pies last year. This year, though, business is down.

Marcum and Lovelace hope others who haven't been hit as hard by the economic slowdown will help. Grocery bags have been left at local markets for prospective donors to fill. A turkey dinner and trimmings generally costs about \$35 per family.

Families receive potatoes, gravy in a can or mix, rice, stuffing, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie filling, two cans of vegetables, two cans of soups, cake mix, plus a cash voucher for \$15-20 to cover the cost of perishable foods.

To make it easier for commuters, the Ben Lomond Texaco is accepting donations for the food drive from 5-8 p.m.

Marcum worries reports about the Red Cross' handling of donations for victims of the terrorist attacks will hurt the local drive.

"People are going to be leery of all charities," she said. "You want an accountable organization."

Marcum said Valley Churches has very little overhead, she takes no salary, and that much of the work is done by volunteers.

She hopes it won't be necessary for the group to tap its Christmas money, saying she's seen some of the "Dear Santa" letters children have sent.

"We try to instill a feeling of hope that people still care in the midst of all this tragedy," she said.

Checks can be addressed to Valley Churches United Missions, 9400 Highway 9, Ben Lomond, CA 95006. Donations can be left at Valley Churches 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, or at Ben Lomond Texaco, 9500 Highway 9, from 5-8 p.m. Call 336-8258.

Contact Jondi Gumz at jgumz@santa-cruz.com.