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Mission to get permit as food bank to increase aid

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ARLINGTON - At the first of each month, when her husband's paycheck goes for the rent, Debra Lee knows she can count on Mission Arlington for enough food to feed her five children.

Now, the private social-service agency at 210 W. South St. will be able to help even more people with groceries. The agency is obtaining a city permit to operate as a food bank and is also registering with the state Health Department.

"My husband takes his whole check and he pays the rent, and the food stamps, they come on about the 10th or 12th, and it's hard to have food for five kids," Lee said. ". . . I'm kind of glad to have help like that during that time."

The idea for the food bank came after Pat Akin, a senior sanitarian with the city health department, came out to inspect complaints of a smelly trash bin and advise the mission to step up its garbage collection schedule.

"It was a minor problem," Akin said. ". . . After we got back there and started talking, I wanted to help them get more food."

The certification makes it easier to get donations from companies and grocery stores, which can receive a tax break for donations of food only if the food goes to a certified food bank, Akin said.

Getting a city permit is simple, Akin said. The mission must consolidate its food into one area and pass annual inspections.

Until last week, when Akin mentioned the possibility to her, Mission Arlington executive director Tillie Burgin didn't realize the mission could become a certified food bank, she said.

"We've been working with the food bank in Fort Worth but only as an emergency," Burgin said. "This will give us a way to have more."

The mission has been getting its food stock from the Food Bank of Greater Tarrant County in Fort Worth. The Texas Rangers baseball club also has donated the leftover hot dogs and buns from home games.

Mission Arlington has been giving food to about 50 people a day, Burgin said. Now, she hopes to give food to at least 100 people a day.

That will help a lot of people who are in the same plight as she is every month, Lee said.

"We talk to a lot of people around here and a lot of them just don't have," Lee said.

There definitely is a need in Arlington for a sizable food bank, said Larry Johnson, executive director of the Arlington Night Shelter.

"It makes it so much more accessible to the people who really need it," he said. ". . . I get calls often at the shelter from people who are looking for food. A gentleman just called me, he didn't have

any food in the house, the electricity was going to be turned off and he needed some formula for his baby and of course I sent him to Mission Arlington."

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