

Hoosipalooza celebrates community

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HOOSICK FALLS, N.Y. -- A celebration of community, Saturday's inaugural Hoosipalooza provided a day's worth of events free of charge, all benefiting the local food pantry.

"It was community organized," said Aelish Nealon, executive director of the Hoosick Area Youth Center and Community Coalition (HAYC3), which put together the one-day event. "That made it an easy sell."

Organizers had two goals in mind, Nealon said, the first of which was to raise funds for a local community organization -- this year, the Hoosick Falls Food Pantry, located on John Street and operated by the Hoosick Area Church Association. Nealon estimated Sunday the event had raised about \$2,000 for the community pantry.

"That's a month's supply of food," said Dianne Hosterman, the food pantry's coordinator. Hosterman said the pantry, open three days a week, had served the Hoosick community for more than 40 years. Last month, the pantry served 142 families, she said, including 97 children and 34 seniors.

The second goal of Hoosipalooza, to "build a community bonding experience," resulted in events at participating area businesses and churches in addition to community spaces and parks. Nealon called it an "intergenerational approach" involving community members of all ages. "All the doors were opened at all locations," she said, including not only activities for children, like baton lessons, but also iolin music at a church and open houses at the Louis Miller Museum and John Street Gallery.

While weather conspired against some of the scheduled winter activities, most events Saturday were not weather dependent and, besides food, were free of charge. Instead of a fee, donations were accepted at each location to go toward the food pantry. "People have been incredibly generous," said Nealon. She said the event would be reprised next year as an annual tradition, likely with a revolving beneficiary.

Hosterman said other programs offered through the pantry include a year-round home delivered meal program for home-bound seniors, through a partnership with the Town of Hoosick Lions Club. The pantry also offers holiday food baskets, back-to-school supplies, and volunteer free tax preparation. Last year, the pantry served 4,585 individuals more than 42,000 meals.

A member of the Food Pantries of the Capital District, Hosterman said the Hoosick Falls Food Pantry ordered on average about three tons of food and other supplies a month, delivered from the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York in Latham.