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Spano's call for donations helps Westchester food drive

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MILLWOOD - Christina Rohatynskij stood in front of tons of food - some of it stacked as high as the ceiling in The Food Bank for Westchester's warehouse - and gave a genuine thank you to several people responsible for getting it there.

"We're happy to do it," said one of the men, Willard Hill, an executive with the Armonk-based MBIA Insurance Corp., which yesterday presented a \$20,000 check to the food bank that has seen donations drop off during the summer.

"It's important," Rohatynskij said to Hill, who was standing next to County Executive Andrew Spano. "People need this help."

MBIA's donation was part of Westchester County's "What Happens in August" food drive, which Spano and other officials kicked off last week to spur more donations. MBIA's check was the largest single donation and among many made by area residents to the nonprofit food bank, which helps feed Westchester's hungry.

Roughly 10,000 pounds were collected over two days at 53 drop points involving 12 municipalities, 12 libraries and 19 county offices.

Hill, of Pound Ridge, said he hoped the contribution would alleviate some of the shortages the food bank was dealing with, especially during the summer when donations traditionally drop.

"People are hungry year-round," Hill said. "The time to do something was now."

The company and its foundation have donated \$45,000 so far this year and about \$250,000 since 1991, he said.

Spano said he was pleased to use his bully pulpit as a means of addressing the need. He said he'll do it earlier in the summer next year.

"When there are holidays, it's easy," Spano said. "It's during these times that people need the help."

The food bank ships about 5 million pounds of food to hundreds of organizations each year - it has seen requests increase by 15 percent, particularly because of the poor economy and rising unemployment.

"People are hungry. August is traditionally a tough time. Few people are thinking about this. ... We always need more," Rohatynskij said. "Nothing is too small or too large."

Allen Golan, owner of Shleppers Moving and Storage in Yonkers, did what he could to help and donated two men and a truck to transport the goods.

"If we can help in any way, that's the minimum we can do," he said.