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UCM event showcases services, new space

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By Sam Dietrich

Area residents in need of a hand have access to a miniature grocery store minus the price tags. United Christian Ministries of Jackson County has plenty of donated products available, from paper towels to frozen peas.

Last Wednesday, UCM held an open house and dedication that included volunteers and others to celebrate their upgraded pantry. Frank Royce, UCM Board chair, put up a plaque on the wall inside the UCM building in dedication to the volunteers of UCM.

"With the help of many, here we are," Royce said. "Bigger, better, stronger. We're helping two times the people we have helped in years past. Today, we not only want to celebrate the wonderful building and the service we provide, but we also want to thank all the volunteers at UCM who make this possible."

According to Director of Outreach Joyce Pope the purpose of the dedication and the open house is to let people see how UCM works and get a grasp of how they operate.

"Sometimes you don't really grasp it just by talking about it," Pope said. "When new people come in, they go, 'Oh my gosh! It's like a grocery store!' and that's the idea."

Operating since 1989, UCM is a nonprofit ministry helping people with urgent physical, economic, social and spiritual needs. Their main goal is to help people become "whole" persons in body, mind and spirit, according to their website.

UCM has grown from a storefront office to a full-size pantry and office. They provide many clients with a food pantry, personal items, and financial assistance for essential bills to residents of Jackson County. More than 95 percent of people who come for assistance are Jackson County residents.

According to Pope, anyone who comes to them for help will be provided with just that. It doesn't matter what religion they come from, she says.

"We're not going to question you and wonder if you deserve help," Pope said. "We are here to love and support people. It is not up to us to judge. We don't know if they made bad decisions or have medical problems or whatever. All we care about is helping people in need."

UCM provides many food products for clients in need. Products include canned foods, bottled water, pickles, fruits, vegetables, frozen foods and more. UCM also gave out more than 76,000 bags of food last year. So far in 2022, they have given out over 11,000 bags of groceries, helped out over 1,200 families and provided more than \$50,000 in financial assistance to pay for people's rent, power and more.

UCM also provides personal hygienic products, including paper towels, toilet paper, tampons, diapers and more.

Dogwood Health Trust gave UCM a \$50,000 grant to upgrade their pantry about six months ago, Pope said.

UCM's website says people can donate items like spaghetti, spaghetti sauce, peanut butter, canned beans (any type), corn, peas, fruits, soups and more.

"We take plenty of food for the pantry and even blankets in the winter," Pope said.

UCM works with more than 40 volunteers to manage operations. Their volunteers come from local churches, local schools, Boy Scouts, civic groups and more. Whether they can fill pantry orders or answer phones, UCM always accepts new volunteers.

For more information about UCM, visit www.ucmhelp.com. UCM is located at 191 Skyland Drive in Sylva. They are open from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays, 12:30-5 p.m. on Tuesdays and 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

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