

Community Strength

Rice Lake's RoughDeck® floor scale helps a food pantry in Birchwood, Wisconsin simplify the shelf-to-table process.

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but for the village of Birchwood that just isn't enough. This small town in Wisconsin is also providing solutions to an oftentimes invisible problem: food insecurity. According to the USDA, food insecurity is the "lack of access, at times, to have enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods." Food insecurity doesn't just affect those living below the poverty line—any walk of life can experience it. Whether it's from an unexpected hospital bill, a gap in a paycheck deposit or a sudden car repair, the stress of not knowing where the next meal is coming from can be devastating.

Originally founded by Bess Knapmiller and Fred Vreeland, the Birchwood Area Food Pantry teamed up with the local Lions Club in 1975 to distribute food on holidays. The pantry was held in the Birchwood United Methodist church with most of the supplies coming from area churches, individual community members and other local organizations. They outgrew their space and moved into the Birchwood Senior Center. Finding that they still had a need for more room, the Birchwood Area Food Pantry relocated to its current building on Main Street—easily accessible to its target population of those who live within a 20 mile radius of Birchwood. In 2010, the pantry became a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit charitable corporation. Funded solely on donations, their philosophy is simple: "To realize and recognize the human dignity of each individual; and to recognize that individuals, community members, religious organizations, and businesses want to and will participate by helping others in our community if they are aware of the need; and to honor each act of giving."

Continued on page 12



On the first and third Monday and Saturday of each month, the Birchwood Area Food Pantry opens its doors. The pantry welcomes everyone and there are no income requirements. Most importantly though, there are no judgments. When asked what the food pantry wanted to accomplish, Bonnie Johnson, food procurement officer, simply says, “We just want to feed people.” Senior citizens, the crux of the Birchwood Area Food Pantry, are at the highest risk for food insecurity. According to Feed My People food bank in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 67 percent of people utilizing food pantries in Wisconsin are forced to choose between food and medical care.

floor scale is essential—not only for the people using the food pantry but also the food pantry itself that needs to easily track and record incoming and outgoing food.

Feed My People Food Bank is a distribution center that supplies more than 7.3 million pounds of food annually to 128 hunger-relief agencies in 14 west-central Wisconsin counties. Feed My People provides 58 percent of the food at the Birchwood Area Food Pantry.

According to Emily Moore, executive director of Feed My People, one of the ways they are able to assess the areas in need is by weighing how much food goes in to the food pantry and how much food goes out.

they also help fight food insecurity, one grocery cart at a time. ■

“A dream come true”

Bonnie Johnson,
Food procurement officer, Birchwood Area Food Pantry

With baby boomers peaking in the next 10 years, the growing number of senior citizens on fixed incomes with health issues could signify an even greater need for organizations like the Birchwood Area Food Pantry.

Individuals at the Birchwood Area Food Pantry used to walk up and down the aisles with a grocery cart, pick out their food and have to physically unload the cart onto a tabletop scale. They would then load the cart back up to take home. This was often a struggle for senior citizens or individuals with medical issues who could not physically lift all of the food they needed. The process was cumbersome and inefficient. Now, with Rice Lake’s RoughDeck floor scale, individuals can simply roll the cart onto the floor scale, have the weight of the cart tared, the food weight recorded and they’re out the door. Bonnie says that the RoughDeck floor scale has been a “dream come true.” Built for repeatable weighing, RoughDeck floor scales are the strongest, most accurate floor scales available. A superior structural design ensures that deck deflection is minimized and weightings remain accurate over a long period of time. In an environment like a busy food pantry, a reliable and accurate

For example, during the first six months of 2016, the nonprofit food assistance programs that partner with Feed My People in Washburn County (where the Birchwood Area Food Pantry is located) provided, on average, 50 pounds of food per household served (relative to each individual program). This is 4 percent more than the average program in the overall service area that Feed My People helps. Compared to 2015, the programs in Washburn County have been able to provide 8 percent more food per household, and the total number of households served decreased by 9 percent.

These weight-data assessments help determine distribution needs as well as provide tangible data to research the food insecurity needs of west-central Wisconsin.

The small village of Birchwood is coming together for a common purpose—to raise a community that knows no hunger.

The Birchwood Area Food Pantry not only supplies food to those in need, but also security and community to the greater Birchwood area. RoughDeck floor scales are not only the toughest floor scales in the weighing industry—



Rice Lake’s RoughDeck floor scale transformed the checkout process and now also provides valuable inventory data.
From left to right: Neil Johnson, Lucille Evertsen, Bonnie Johnson and Richard Hokanson

