

CAP delivers hundreds of hatchery salmon



Amy M.E. Fischer / The Daily News CAP volunteer Mary Huels hands a fresh salmon to a waiting volunteer outside Help Warehouse in Longview during Friday's free salmon distribution to low-income residents.

By Amy M.E. Fischer / The Daily News | Posted: Friday, July 23, 2010

The sun was warm, the salmon were fat and the line was long.

Friday, Lower Columbia Community Action Program Help Warehouse distributed 327 whole salmon totaling 2,000 pounds to dozens of low-income residents lined up in a downtown Longview parking lot. Each household received two fish weighing about 8 pounds raised at the Merwin Hatchery.

"I have a large one here — anybody want a big fish?" asked Help Warehouse manager Rick Philbrook, holding up a roughly 16-pound specimen in a black trash bag.

Two people eagerly stepped forward, and it went to a group of women standing next in line.

Castle Rock resident Hen Oup, 56, said she planned to boil her salmon and make a salad with potatoes, cucumber, fish sauce, peanuts and sweet-and-sour sauce.

"It tastes good," said Oup, a native of Cambodia.

Watching CAP volunteer Mary Huels hoist a slippery salmon by the gills out of the delivery truck, Oup grinned. The fish were whole. She would make sour soup with the heads, she said.

The salmon giveaway, CAP's second this month, has been going on for several years. The social service agency and food bank distribution center writes a letter every year to the state requesting hatchery fish, and some years, like this one, there are plenty to go around to various charitable organizations, said Colleen Dean, CAP's basic food coordinator.

Families must show proof of low-income status, such as a food stamp card or Social Security award letter. Friday, 185 households received salmon, said CAP community relations director Alan Rose.

Molly Johnson, 66, planned to share her salmon with family members.

"And if I have a neighbor who needs something to eat, I'll make sure they get some. If there's someone who needs a piece of meat, you share," the Longview resident said. "CAP are good people. What they do here helps so many."

Kelso resident Carol Kylo, 65, said her son would clean the fish for her and she'd bake it in the oven.

"It's really a good thing for people who are low-income like myself," Kylo said.

During the salmon giveaway, CAP also handed out bags of potatoes and tomatoes to clients with USDA surplus commodity cards. CAP has seen a 14 percent increase in the first half of this year compared to 2009 for commodity sign-ups, Dean said.

"They have a really hard time coming in, but we make this really easy to sign up for commodities," she said.

CAP distributes between 5,000 and 5,200 food boxes a month.

Rose said CAP isn't seeing a significant rise in the number of households requesting food, indicating local job losses may have hit a plateau. However, CAP has noticed an increase in the number of people living together, "which means families are grouping up to share expenses," he said.

"People really are struggling and all we can hope for is the recession will turn around," Rose said.