

'Stamp Out Hunger' benefits BEAM

by CHUCK ADAMS
STAFF WRITER

Saturday's 18th annual National Association of Letter Carriers National Food Drive, "Stamp Out Hunger," benefitted, among other local organizations, BEAM [Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry] and Mission House, as well as various other charitable or non-profit groups in Duval and St. Johns counties.

The drive, the nation's largest one-day food drive, is held the second Saturday in May in all states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam. Last year's drive collected a record 73.4 million pounds of food.

Donations from Saturday's drive were expected to push the overall total to more than one-billion pounds collected. The total entering the drive was 982.7-million pounds.

Donations were collected by more than 1,400 local branches of the 295,000-member postal union.

The letter carriers' drive produced 36,820 pounds of non-perishable food for BEAM, which, in turn, benefitted from the loan of a 24-foot truck and driver from Second Harvest, which has foodbanks across the country. Truck and driver were used to pick up BEAM's donations at the Atlantic Beach Post Office, 1001 Mayport Road.

St. Johns County has 16 foodbanks to which dona-



photo by CHUCK ADAMS

Looking at the task ahead as volunteers help sort food Monday at BEAM are, from left, Martha Denneen, Connie Phillips and Florence Charlton. The food to be sorted was collected in a letter carriers' national food drive Saturday.

tions were taken from its various post offices, Julie Gustafson said Monday from the USPS office in St. Augustine, adding, "We picked up from the Ponte Vedra Post Office and brought it here.

"All the food we collected totaled 81,000 pounds," she said.

Among the St. Johns County beneficiaries were

the Salvation Army, Communities in Schools, Betty Griffin House and churches.

The sorting of donated non-perishable foodstuffs began at 7 a.m. Monday at BEAM. By mid-afternoon, it was one-quarter completed.

"We brought all the food over on Saturday with a crew of about 25 volunteers," Vivian Southwell,

executive director of BEAM, said shortly after 3:30 p.m.

The Second Harvest-loaner featured a lift, which made getting food into the truck that much easier. It also was the first time BEAM had a truck.

"We used to share Jax Beach with Mission House," said Southwell. "Mission House picked up at Jax Beach, and we picked up for

the first time in Atlantic Beach. They have about 50 trucks, which is twice as many as Jax Beach."

Upwards of five trips were needed to get the 36,000-plus pounds to the BEAM offices at 850 6th Ave. S. in Jacksonville Beach.

"We used the big orange rolling totes the post office uses," said Southwell. "Those are about 800

pounds when you fill them up. We had, I think, 45-46 of those.

"So we're really, really tired," she said with a hearty laugh.

"We're partners with Second Harvest," added Southwell. "We get a huge amount of food from them. Last year, we got almost 85,000 pounds from Second Harvest. They're a critical food partner for us."

Helping sort food in mid-afternoon were Florence Charlton, Martha Denneen and Connie Phillips.

Charlton was a board member of BEAM, which started in 1985, in the early 1990s. She's now a regular volunteer, working the front desk.

Charlton had gone in at 10 a.m. Monday to work in the office, then switched over at 1 p.m. to the sorting process. The sorting was to continue until 7 p.m., but with different people involved.

With so much remaining to be sorted, Southwell began to wonder whether BEAM had enough storage space.

"It's a good problem to have. It's always a better problem than the other way around. Because we were looking at bare shelves Friday afternoon," she said, noting that volunteers had worked until noon filling the shelves.

So the timing was good. "Ah, it couldn't have been better," said Southwell.