

Butler Library offers new 'Little Free Pantry'

By William Pitts

Eagle Staff Writer

Butler Area Public Library is accepting donations for its Little Free Pantry, a mini-food bank that anyone can donate to and take from at any time.

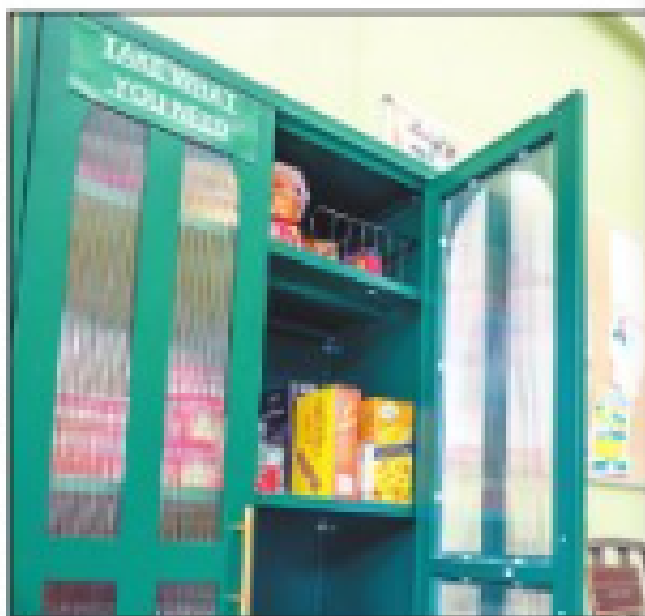
As is written on the signs above the pantry, anyone can "take what they need" with no questions asked, and "give what they can" to replenish the pantry.

The idea for bringing the Little Free Pantry to the Butler Area Public Library started with the Butler Collaborative for Families, a network of community organizations in Butler County of which the library is a member.

"They were doing a grant opportunity where the library, or any organization that was part of the BCF, could submit an idea that would combat food insecurity here in Butler," said assistant library director Peter Bess.

The idea of the "Little Free Pantry" is not original to Butler Area Public Library. In fact, the program started in Fayetteville, Ark., in 2016 as a spinoff of the "Little Free Library" concept. According to the program's website, there have been over 2,300 pantries installed over all corners of the United States and parts of Canada.

Other Little Free Pantries exist in Western Pennsylvania, including in Ambridge, DuBois and New Brighton, according to a map on the website.



The Little Free Pantry at Butler Area Public Library is open for donations and for those in need.

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"Having been in the library field for a while now, I had heard of other libraries doing something similar ... offering a food pantry within their facility, and I thought that would be a good idea," Bess said. "So I submitted a grant proposal for that and we were awarded the grant."

Throughout the month of June, the library ran a food drive to begin stocking the pantry. According to Bess, by the time the library opened the pantry to the public in early July, the food bank was such a success that the pantry was already stuffed full — and it doesn't officially conclude until the end of July.

"We did the food drive just to kind of raise awareness for the food pantry," Bess said. "(The pantry) is currently stocked. We do have some overflow that we

are storing here in the library."

Not all food items are eligible to be accepted to the pantry. The library is not looking for any items that are already expired or would require refrigeration, as the pantry has no refrigeration capabilities.

While the library is otherwise not picky about the items it accepts, it is especially looking for granola bars, macaroni and cheese, soup, dried fruit, apple sauce, nuts, bottled water and canned food items.

"Canned goods are really good to have for something like this," Bess said. "Canned soups that people can just open and heat up are great."

For those visiting the library, the pantry should be unmissable — it is inside the entryway on the left as you enter the building.