

Scout's Food Pantry project a go

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/022113/scoutsSM.png> **Port teenager reaches \$60,000 fundraising goal to give agency a supply lift**

On Tuesday, volunteers at the Food Pantry in Port Washington got welcome news.

Girl Scout Mikayla Schowalter had just received the final donations needed to install a cargo lift at the pantry, which is located in the basement of the St. Peter of Alcantara Catholic Church rectory.

"Everyone just applauded," Executive Director Joy Dreier said Tuesday night. "It was a fun, fun morning."

Schowalter, a member of Troop 8382, is thrilled to have reached her goal. It took about four months to obtain the \$60,000 needed for the project, she said.

One of the last contributions came from students at Dunwiddie Elementary School in Port Washington, who selected her project as the recipient of their recent Coin Wars. The students raised \$1,002 through the challenge.



"When I got the phone call, I was excited that they chose my project," Schowalter said.

About 400 individuals, organizations, churches and businesses contributed to the lift, she said.

"Most of it was individual donations," Schowalter said, although there were numerous other contributions from businesses and groups. "The contributions were both large and small.

"I just want to thank everyone for believing in me and my project."

It's a project near to Schowalter's heart. Since the Port Washington High School freshman was a little girl, she's helped at the Food Pantry.

When she made her First Communion in 2006, instead of gifts she asked her friends and family for donations to the pantry, collecting 57 pounds of food and \$182.50.

She's helped out at food drives and in the pantry for a decade. Last year, as part of her Girl

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Scout Journey award project, she got students at Port Catholic School to donate 613 pounds of food in exchange for being able to wear street clothes instead of uniforms to classes for three days.

Each week, volunteers, many of them senior citizens, bring cases of eggs and boxes of canned goods and vegetables down the stairs, Dreier said, and they haul stacks of trash and recyclables up the steps.

"I've seen all the volunteers carrying 50-pound bags of potatoes and boxes of turkeys down the stairs," Schowalter said when announcing her project. "The lift would eliminate a lot of the lifting they do and make it a lot safer for them."

Dreier echoed that sentiment this week.

"It's just an answer to so many prayers," she said. "We never envisioned something like this happening. This is such a big project, and it means so much. I don't know if I'm more excited for us or for Mikayla.

"I'm just waiting for the day Mikayla sees it operating, and the sense of accomplishment she'll feel. I am in total amazement of her."

Schowalter said she's already ordered the lift, which will take six to eight weeks to fabricate.

"It's in the process of being made right now," she said, adding installation should begin sometime in April.

It will take about a month to install the cargo lift and make the necessary changes to the pantry office to accommodate it. By late May, the lift should be ready for use, she said.

"I'm so excited to see the reaction on the volunteers' faces when it's completed," Schowalter said. "This was my idea, but I couldn't have done it without the help of others."

While the appreciation of the volunteers at the Food Pantry will be her reward, there is one more accolade Schowalter will receive when the lift is up and running.

She will receive her Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest honor a Girl Scout can achieve.

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Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON Girl Scout Mikayla Schowalter visited Dunwiddie Elementary School Friday, Feb. 15, to thank students for helping her reach her goal of \$60,000 to purchase and install a cargo lift at the Food Pantry. The youngsters raised \$1,002 during a two-week coin war to contribute to the project. Gathered around Schowalter's progress board were (clockwise from Schowalter) Jenna Johnson, Josh Bongiorno, Liberty Bell, Jessica Clements, Ellie Schmidt, Henry Modjeski and Ryan Luib. Photo by Sam Arendt