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By *Colin Ellis* on November 23, 2015 @colinoellis

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PORTLAND — The holiday season is already proving more challenging than usual for the Salvation Army.

Maj. Annette Lock said the number of donations the organization has received this year, and overall donor commitment towards the annual Thanksgiving food collection, is down from years past. The organization will be providing Thanksgiving baskets to just 100 families — about half as many as a year ago.

"We are having a hard time finding donations this year," Lock said last week, adding the group's pantry is "pretty much bare."

Food parcels were distributed to families Nov. 24. Applicants were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis. Included in the parcels were items such as cranberry sauce, stuffing mix and other traditional Thanksgiving foods. Each parcel also came with a grocery store gift card to purchase a turkey or "whatever they want as the main ingredient," Lock said.

And while the overall number of families served is down — last year, Lock said, the organization served closer to 200 families — the food distribution is still important.

"That's 100 families that would not have had Thanksgiving dinner," Lock said. "When everyone comes together it really makes a difference. Even if the numbers are lower than we would like."

Lock said the smaller numbers are a "sign of the general climate" for the generosity families and businesses can afford right now. She said the organization is trying to spread the word of the need for donations, as well as reach new donors.

She said the Salvation Army, at 297 Cumberland Ave., will make up whatever items are not donated for Thanksgiving baskets from its operating budget, but that will result in making "services that much tighter" next year.

But Thanksgiving is not the only holiday the Salvation Army has on its radar.

Lock said the Salvation Army has begun its annual **Red Kettle Christmas Campaign** earlier than usual this year. The campaign raises money to help provide food, toys and clothing to more than 6 million people around the United States. Because of the need for increased programs and funding, she said the kettle campaign goal has been raised to \$180,000, up from \$140,000 last year.

The kettle campaign is in "small force" right now, she said, only setting up at a few stores. Most of the stores that Salvation Army partners with for the campaign don't allow bell-ringers before Thanksgiving. The kettle campaign runs through Dec. 24.

Lock also said the Salvation Army's **Christmas donation drive** will be much larger than the Thanksgiving drive, hoping to provide goods to around 900 Portland families. She said the drive will reach an estimated 3,000 children, through a collection of toys, clothing, mittens and other items. Lock said they have also committed to packing "Christmas cheer bags" for 100 senior citizens, which will include a gift card to a grocery store and two gift items.

"Of those 100, (we) still have 33 houses that have not been adopted for cheer bags, plus a waiting list on top of that," Lock said. "It would be great for someone to step up and adopt (people on the list)."

She said the easiest way for people to get more information about donating to the cause or adopting families is to call the organization at 774-4172.

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Maj. John Lock of the Salvation Army helps bring in donated food items last week for the annual Thanksgiving basket drive at the organization's 297 Cumberland Ave. headquarters in Portland.

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