

# Kiewit Foundation grant boosts city emergency aid

By Julie Blum

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COLUMBUS — Area food pantries and a relief agency will be getting a boost thanks to the Columbus Area Community Foundation.

The foundation received a \$20,000 grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation in Omaha designated for agencies that provide emergency food and energy relief. This is the second year in a row the foundation won the grant.

Rick Chochon, chairman of the foundation, said the Columbus Area United Way was consulted to determine where the funding should go if it was awarded to Columbus. The Platte County Food Pantry, Columbus Emergency Relief and Simon House will be the recipient of the funds because of the work the agencies do in providing food and shelter.

All three agencies help hundreds of people each year. They all have reported an increase in the number of individuals and families seeking assistance.

Patsy Konecky, manager of the Simon House, said more people have use the services each year since 2004. Through the first 11 months of this year, a total of 2,033 families have been assisted at Simon House, the majority needing clothing and food. In 2008, the total helped was 2,042 families.

The agency assists through various ways including food, clothing, furniture, rent, utilities, gas vouchers, school supplies, Christmas gifts, medicine and setting up doctor and dentist appointments.

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Chochon

## Grant

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The Food Pantry expects to serve 900 families this year, said Executive Director Pat Cool. In 2008 it assisted 722 families. Through September of this year, 688 families had received assistance.

Because of the increase in people seeking out the Food Pantry, more groceries have had to be purchased at the Omaha Food Bank and at local grocery stores this year than ever before. Cool said through September this year they have spent \$16,765 more than they did through the same time period in 2008.

Emergency Relief assisted 485 people in 2008. The agency provides help for individuals and families with rent, utilities, medicine and gasoline.

The grant money will be

dispersed among the three agencies. The Food Pantry will receive \$10,000 to purchase more food, and the Simon House and Emergency Relief will each get \$5,000 each. Emergency Relief will use the money to pay for vouchers for emergency shelter and energy costs. The money will be spent by Simon House for assistance with electric and gas bills.

The Columbus Area Community Foundation was established in 2006. It uses charitable contributions to support current and emerging needs in the community and surrounding area. The goal of the foundation is to build a \$500,000 endowment. It awarded its first grants in 2008 to the Hometown Competitiveness youth task force, entrepreneurship task force and the leadership task force.