

# OUR TOWNS

Gayville  
Mission Hill  
Volin

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## Residents Pitch In To **Volin Family Homeless After Fire**

### Get Mobile Food Pantry Rolling

BY LORETTA SORENSEN  
P&D Correspondent

Gayville and Volin residents are pitching in to organize and in some cases reaping the benefits of the mobile food pantry that was initiated there this past November.

One of the pantry organizers, Barbara Egbert, wife of Gayville Lutheran Church pastor Ralph Egbert, said the pantry has been put together in a simple way to make it easy for volunteers to help address basic needs of the Gayville-Volin community.

"We bought 12 very large clear plastic containers with snap-on lids that hold the food," Egbert said. "Each container has a label on it to identify what types of food it holds. We distribute food one Saturday morning from 10 to 12 in each community. We just load the food into the car and take it to the distribution location and people can come in and pick up what they need."

Currently, the mobile pantry organizers are making use of their personal cars to transport the food because there are currently no funds to cover maintenance of a car or van. A temporary storage area has been organized at Egbert's church, however she said a permanent location is being prepared in Volin.

"We've done some fund raising to help pay for the food," Egbert said. "We've also had donations from private persons. I'm in the process of applying for commodities from the State of South Dakota. We can obtain those supplies for a minimal shipping and handling fee. That would ensure a consistent supply of food in the pantry."

Plans and some funding for the Gayville-Volin food pantry have developed from a larger project the two communities are involved in, South Dakota Horizons. The Horizons project is a joint effort of South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service and Northwest Area Foundation. Housing, business development and community recreational opportunities are among the other areas the Horizons committee have worked with in the Gayville-Volin area.

In addition to the food pantry, Egbert said the community plans to expand on a community garden and organize efforts to make excess garden produce available to anyone who is willing to pick it up.

"The school in Gayville developed a community garden before the Horizons project was ever initiated," Egbert said. "We worked with school officials over the summer to further develop the garden, too. We've also organized a Bounty Table that will be held over summer. Gardeners can bring their excess produce to the event and people in the community can come in and pick it up."

The Christmas blizzard and recent arctic blast that kept children home from school may have put added strain on some households that depend on school meals to help with the family grocery budget. Egbert said families with children were among those who were recipients of food products in January.

"It's surprising to me that people are hesitant to ask for help," Egbert said. "They take pride in being able to support their family, which is good. But this is a resource we hope people will not hesitate to use. Making sure everyone has the food they need is something our communities want

to participate in. We want to help families find a way to obtain the help they need and at the same time maintain their dignity. I know it's a resource that's very much appreciated."

Community support for the pantry has been very strong from the start. Volin resident Marie Fleming, her husband Chuck and Gayville businessman Greg Pirak have all been instrumental in making food pantry plans a reality. All have been involved in purchasing, sorting and organizing food storage bins. Other volunteers assisting with the project include Julie Weiland, Paula Marshall, Larry Buffington, Jenny Rice and Ella Hirock.

"We couldn't have made the project a success without the help of numerous sponsors," Egbert said. "We've received assistance from both the Gayville and Volin Post Office, Gayville's CoTrust Bank, and the Gayville-Volin American Legion."

Other sponsors for the food pantry project include the Gayville-Volin School and three local churches: Gayville, Bergen and First United Lutheran.

"People in the community really want to help with this project," Egbert said. "Our response has been immediate and very generous. We all know these are difficult economic times. There are probably people experiencing budget difficulties now that never had that kind of problem before. Sharing what we have is a basic Christian response to need — instruction from God, if you will. And I think people here are very willing to get involved in this project."

More information about the food pantry and distribution dates, times and locations is available by calling 605-267-4336 (Gayville) and 605-267-0197 (Volin.)

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON  
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VOLIN — An area family is looking to the future after their home was destroyed in a fire this past weekend.

"I think about the things I've lost, but I don't know — what do you do?" said Volin resident Justin Thompson. "You move on."

Neither Thompson nor his three children — Klara, 6, Kohners, 4, and Grayden, 5 months — were home at the time of the fire, which occurred Saturday night.

"I was at work all day," Thompson said. "My kids were actually gone for the weekend, so nobody had been there."

He added that his family was doing well, despite the circumstances.

"The kids got home (Monday), so they actually took it pretty well," Thompson said. "They're strong kids, and we're holding together. It's hard, but I think we'll make it through."

Volin firefighters were called to the scene a half-block from Mac's around 8:21 p.m. Saturday, and firefighters from Wakonda and Yankton were later called to assist.

Thompson said that whenever the fire started, it must have burned quickly.

"I stopped in at seven o'clock, and there was nothing going on, and I got the call right after eight, so it must have happened within that hour," he said.

The home, which was not insured, was completely destroyed in the fire.

A neighboring home also had smoke damage and lost power, and one member of the Volin Fire Department had to be taken to Avera Sacred Heart Hospital for a minor case of smoke inhalation.

A unit from the Lesterville Fire Department was also on the scene to help firefighters who might need to warm up after being exposed to the cold temperatures.



TRAVIS GULBRANDSON/P&D

Smoke continued to trickle out of the remains of the Thompson house in Volin Tuesday, three days after it was consumed by fire. The structure was a total loss, and according to authorities, it was not insured.

According to Yankton Deputy Fire chief Larry Nickles, the home had balloon framing similar to the Meckling and Scotland homes that burned in the past two months. Buildings with this framing don't usually have fire stops, which makes it easy for flames to travel within the walls and burn for some time without being noticed.

Thompson said the full impact of the incident has not hit him yet, and that now he is trying to take stock of what the family still has.

However, some of their losses are more difficult than others, he said, such as the family's cat, which died in the fire.

"I think that was a pretty hard blow to the kids," Thompson said. "They went to school (Tuesday), so their lives are going back to normal as much as possible."

But the community is pulling together to help the family in their time of need, he said.

"There's an apartment that Jeremy Nelson owns in Volin, so he's going to let me stay there until I find something permanent," Thompson said.

Thompson's sister, Deonna

Rupp, said that a benefit auction is in the process of being set up, and there are things area residents can do to help before that time, as well.

One of those things is to donate essential living supplies that the family can use.

"Short term, we're needing small kitchen appliances, a vacuum, towels, bedding, washcloths, things like that," Rupp said.

Items such as these can be dropped off at Rupp's house, which is located in Volin at 308 Lincoln St.

Other drop-off points are being established in the surrounding area, including:

- The National Guard Armory in Vermillion
- CoTrust Bank in Gayville
- 123 E. Main St., Irene

A Yankton donation spot is currently pending.

Financial donations can also be made to the Justin Thompson Fire Benefit Fund at any CoTrust Bank location.

Press & Dakotan reporter Nathan Johnson contributed to this report.



COURTESY PHOTO

In a recent photo, Volin resident Justin Thompson stands with his three children, Klara, 6, Kohners, 4, and Grayden, 5 months. The Thompson family lost their house in a fire this past weekend.

Sanford Vermillion Medical Center

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