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SHARE FOOD NETWORK EXTENDS YOUR FOOD DOLLAR

America is the land of plenty, but during these economic times, families are wondering how to cover basic needs like food, which is at the highest price ever recorded. Meanwhile last month, economists predict food prices will be 5 percent higher this fall than the previous fall. Reasons cited are cold weather, crop damage from harsh winter freezes, droughts in other countries that export food to America, and sky-high gasoline prices.

For most families, food is the second largest expense after housing. According to the most recently released figures from USDA monthly costs to feed a typical family of four is Thrifty plan \$599, low-cost plan \$779, moderate cost plan \$974 and liberal plan \$1185. Calculations are for food needs for two adults and two children, ages 6-8 and 9-11 for January 2011. To see what your family's food costs are see the USDA tables at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/2011/CostofFoodJan2011.pdf>

To address this urgent need for advice on maximizing your food dollars I will be highlighting local resources during April and May in my column.

This task connected me with Sandy Reisinger, Senior Coordinator at Community Living Inc., a non-profit dedicated to serving persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I found Sandy via the SHARE Food Network and interviewed her to understand how SHARE helps to put food on the table for her clients.

The fact is that the SHARE Food Network is open to everyone. SHARE, an acronym for Self Help And Resource Exchange, began in 1983 in San Diego, CA, and in 1990 it was launched in this area. SHARE works by pooling nationwide dollars to purchase food at wholesale prices and passes the savings on to its participants. Volunteers re-package the food and distribute it throughout a network of SHARE Host Sites. The Frederick sites are Knights of Columbus, 5785 Hannover Ct, 301-695-8263, and First Baptist of Frederick, 7040 Bowers Rd, 301-698-9574.

Sandy states, "SHARE is an empowering organization, there to really help people without a lot of red tape. They have been easy to work with and provide valuable resources to users." With all the budget cuts, affecting people with disabilities this is a vital resource for providing basic needs like food. Sandy wants the program to grow in Frederick where participation has been

poor. This could ultimately close the program down here and force their agency to travel to a site in Montgomery County to pick up the food.

SHARE operates by offering a nutritious food package (\$40-\$45 value) to anyone for \$20.00. Each package contains 13-14 items consisting of 5-7 lbs. of meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, and staple grocery items. The package is designed to supplement a family's food budget with savings of up to 50% over local grocery store prices. To place an order visit www.sharedc.org or call 301-864-3115. Payment can be made by EBT/Food Stamp, Debit/Credit Card, Cash, or Money Order.

SHARE is not a governmental program and is funded solely by the price of the food package. Sandy sings high praises about the food, which is mainly fresh and not processed, and packaged in typical portion sizes like a 4 oz. chicken breast. She explains, "This helps clients not to overeat and to prepare home cooked nutritious meals. The food package comes with healthy recipes, via a newsletter, so consumers will know how to use the foods in that months package."

I encourage local citizens to take advantage of this invaluable resource. When you order a SHARE Package you get more than just good quality food, you are giving back to the community. The more people that participate, the stronger SHARE becomes.

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