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Central High students John Kelley (left), Phoenix Castaneda (center) and Leonard Carreiro pick up holiday food from the school pantry as volunteer Shelly Arceneaux (right) gets a hug from teacher Elizabeth Aragon-Blanton on Thursday.

**GENEROSITY**

# Central High pantry marks a successful year

Holiday party hosted by Santa Claus a gift to students, donors

**BY JON POMPIA**  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The Central High Wildcat Food Pantry marked a successful fall semester with a special holiday party for students, staff and donors, hosted by Santa Claus himself.

After opening in September through a grant from Care and

Share and abetted with donations from citizens and businesses, the pantry's distribution day has seen as many as 60 students take advantage of the generosity.

Thursday's distribution was a bit more special, and not all because of Santa's well wishes and candy canes.

The families of 10

students in need were gifted with a turkey and basket with all the trimmings, just in time for the approaching holiday.

And the pantry's growing list of donors — most notably Care and Share and a 35-member women's life group from Fellowship of the Rockies, as well as pantry volunteers — were pub-

licly acknowledged for their continual offerings of food and time.

"We did this at Thanksgiving, too," said Central Assistant Principal Destin Me-hess, one of the driving forces behind the pantry. "We gave turkeys and bags to 15 families and we wanted to do it again

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for Christmas and make it a little more eventful by having Santa Claus and inviting all staff, students, volunteers and families.”

The gratitude of those receiving not only the turkey dinners but staples like canned vegetables and pasta that line the shelves was humbly evident.

“At the beginning they were a little embarrassed, but not anymore,” said pantry volunteer Shirley Arriaga. “Kids come in, they love it, and they know exactly what they want. It’s been a very gratifying experience.”

The women’s group from Fellowship of the Rockies was lauded by Mehess for its

**Central High student Matthew Montez (right) and Kathy Armenta pose with Santa Claus during the Christmas basket giveaway at the school pantry on Thursday.**

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weekly contribution — so vast that a pickup truck is needed to deliver it — as well as cash

donations.

“There’s a lot of children who are hungry and in need,”

said Shelly Arceneaux, a group member. “And the Lord tells us to give someone something to eat when they’re hungry. And I love helping people, as do the rest of the people at the church.”

Among the party guests were Central Principal Lynn Seifert, and Bobby Gonzales and Frank Latino, members of the board of education of Pueblo City Schools (D60).

“I think this is a great opportunity to showcase the sensitivity of the people involved and the true meaning of Christmas, sharing and giving,” Latino said.

Added Gonzales, “This is special. It shows me they know the community, they know the

community’s needs and that’s very important to reach out and offer support wherever its needed.”

Seifert said the pantry has soothed food-related worries of administrators and staff.

“We give the kids a good breakfast and lunch and then we worry about them over the weekend, maybe that the food just hasn’t stretched far enough.

“For us, it’s easing our minds to know that when they leave here on Thursday afternoon or Friday, that they have something that will keep them sustained.”

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