



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Central High School students take advantage of the new Wildcat Pantry, which stocks food and school supply items.

NUTRITION

The pantry now rings blue

Wildcat food bank offers food, school staples for students, families

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

While the bell rings blue, so now does the pantry.

A first for Pueblo City Schools (D60), the Central High School Wildcat Pantry opened for business Friday with a steady stream of students taking advantage of the free food items and even school supplies.

Occupying a fourth floor room that once served as a book depository, the Wildcat Pantry will make available for Central students, their family members and

school staff, an array of nutritional goods as well as notebooks, pens and other scholarly necessities, donated by the city of Pueblo Transportation Department.

The pantry was made possible through a grant from Care and Share (Feed America) — an endowment that will also see pantries established at East High School, Heroes K-8 Academy and Risley International Academy of Innovation.

With converted bookshelves storing pasta, peanut butter, rice, cake mixes, canned fruit, oatmeal and other staples

— and decorative motifs giving the food dispensary a warm feel — the participating Wildcats were welcomed by Assistant Principal Destin Mehess and school advocate Shirley Arriaga, the driving forces behind the project.

Arriaga said the pantry evolved from a partnership with Care and Share that saw food items delivered to the Central cafeteria once a month.

“We had a lot of families coming in. I mean a lot,” added Mehess. “Then, when Mrs. Arriaga learned of the grant, she said, ‘We have to

jump on this. We have to get going.’”

Before the pantry could become operational, Mehess had to become Safe Serve Certified through an online course, which covered such topics as the proper storage and presentation of food.

“That will be helpful once we start giving out fresh produce,” Mehess said, motioning to a refrigerator that will be used to store the goods.

If opening day was any indication, the Central Pantry will be a wild (cat) success.

In about 20 minutes, 17 students had signed up

to use the pantry, with more continuing to file in.

“We are always looking for partnerships that will allow us to get more nutritious food to more kids,” said Jennifer Mariano, programs director for the Care and Share food bank. As school pantries in El Paso County had proven successful, Care and Share elected to expand to four schools in Pueblo, Mariano said.

And that was great

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