



JAY CALDERON THE DESERT SUN

Hilton Palm Springs employees have started a cares shop offering discounted foods to fellow employees in need.

Hilton staff make sure coworkers have food

Many workers' hours have been cut as result of recession

BY MONICA TORLINE

The Desert Sun

Sometimes an act of goodwill doesn't have to travel far.

That is what employees at the Hilton Palm Springs are finding through a program that benefits employees in need through the support of their own colleagues.

Lynn Pajonk, director of human resources, was reading about homeless shelters in the Coachella Valley needing more donations because demand was on the rise. She suggested to one of her coworkers, Vera Wall, that they start a food collection drive.

"Vera said there were people here who were hungry," Pajonk said.

A significant number of employees at the hotel have had their schedules reduced to 32 hours a week as a result of the economic downturn.

"We knew they were struggling," Wall said. "We said, 'We have our own needs. Let's help them out.'"

The hotel's CARE committee quickly created The Hilton Helping Hand Store, a place employees in need could visit weekly for food and household products.

General Manager Aftab Dada gave the group a storage room near the pool. The engineering department helped spruce up the dark walls and housekeeping found some gently used carpet for the room. It opened April 1.

About 40 employees pledge money on a monthly basis for CARE team shoppers to use in stocking the room with bathroom tissue, bags of beans and rice, jars of mole and spaghetti sauce and cans of fruit cocktail. The Mexican American Grocers Association and Coca-Cola donated some soda, tortillas and other products, too.

Forty-six of the hotel's 165 team members have signed up to use the program. They receive vouchers based on how much they earn or whether there are other adults in their household with a job, Pajonk explained of the system.

"There's that psychological lift that somebody cares about me," she said of the beneficiaries.

And for those who donate?

"I think it has helped morale. We're not walking on air," she said, "but we're feeling better."

Helping hands

Members of the CARE (Caring Attentive Responsive Empowered) committee at the Hilton Palm Springs include:

- Courtney Manger
- Ethel Magee
- Irene Gonzalez
- Vera Wall
- Daniel Pajonk
- Lynn Pajonk
- Belen Cabrera
- Cherry Villanueva
- Lupe Valdez
- Ryan Yumang
- Fernando Samsam