

# THE Beacon-News

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## Need for food pantries growing ‘with no end in sight’



Denise Crosby

If you think high prices in the grocery store or gas line are hitting you hard, consider how much inflation must be affecting residents on low and fixed incomes.

Those who work in our local food pantries think about it every day.

They see it in the statistics,

with Aurora’s two largest pantries reporting a 30% to 36% increase in the guests they are helping just in the last several months.

They hear it in the voices of those who call on the phone, many who have never before used a pantry but say they are now reaching out because there’s no way to feed the family and still try to cover rent.

They also see it in the faces of these new guests, including a growing number of seniors, which Diane Renner, executive director of Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry, describes as “heartbreaking.”

Only recently, Renner received a call from an elderly woman who had just returned from the hospital and was “humbled and embarrassed” about her need for a few food items, asking for only “milk, bread, eggs and soup to get her through.”

Renner delivered those items on Saturday, along with a few extras, like peanut butter and tuna. But the woman, she added, had a hard time looking her in the face and became “choked up” as she was handed the box.

“What it took for her to call us,” said Renner, quickly adding there are far more seniors in the

community who really should use pantries, as inflation is making it tougher than ever to juggle their food, housing and medical needs.

Consider this: In 2021, Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry fed over 100,000 people and gave out over 3.5 million pounds of food. At Marie Wilkinson, 54,714 individuals were served nearly 2 million meals consisting of 1,591,916 pounds of food.

But as inflation continues its uptick, so also do the number of guests who used to come once a month but are now coming every other week or even weekly.

Both pantries are seeing people

in what Renner describes as “more desperate situations.”

That includes Michael Moore, a celiac patient with multiple other autoimmune diseases that have taken a heavy toll on his health and his wallet.

Moore told me he has to live on \$1,300 a month and relies on both pantries to provide the food his body can tolerate. But right now the 70-year-old former software developer is also struggling to find a place to live because his landlord of 11 years is selling the property.

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Theresa Weinschenker casts her ballot in the 2022 primary election at the Vaughan Athletic Center in Aurora on Tuesday. MARK BLACK/BEACON-NEWS

## ‘The popularity in early voting has grown a lot’

Fox Valley voters cast ballots Tuesday in primary election, though many voted early

By Megan Jones  
Beacon-News

While early voting numbers continue to increase in the Fox Valley as more voters cast ballots before election day, overall numbers taking part in Tuesday’s election appeared to be on par with past primary contests.

Voters in the Fox Valley went to the polls Tuesday to vote in a number of races in the primary election, including for governor, seats in the General Assembly, county boards and more.

Of the 328,675 registered voters in Kane County, 34,975 had voted

as of 3 p.m. Tuesday, Kane County Clerk Jack Cunningham said. Of that amount, 13,206 voted early and 21,769 had voted at the polls Tuesday, he said.

A larger amount of Republicans were driven to the polls than Democrats in the county. Around 8,600 voted as Democrats while 13,118 voted as Republicans in-person for the primary as of 3 p.m., Cunningham said.

“We are a little bit above, but not significantly, with 40,000 votes cast at the election date (during the last primary). We’ve got around 21,000 votes today, so we’ve got to pick up 20,000 by

7 p.m., which the voting usually comes stronger at the end of the time,” Cunningham said at mid-afternoon Tuesday.

In DuPage County, around 21% of registered residents voted in the primary election as of 6:45 p.m. In comparison to around 25% of registered residents who voted in the 2018 primary election, DuPage County Clerk Jean Kaczmarek said.

Around 22,000 people voted early, 93,000 people voted on Tuesday and 19,000 submitted mail-in ballots as of 6:45 p.m., she said.

In Kendall County, around

2,887 people voted early in comparison to the 1,400 people who voted early in the 2018 primary election, Kendall County Clerk Debbie Gillette said. Around 920 people voted by mail applications.

“The popularity in early voting has grown a lot and elections are seeing more early voters no matter what the election is,” Gillette said.

Polling places remained open on Tuesday until 7 p.m.

Across Illinois as of Monday morning, 393,924 votes had already been cast, either through

Turn to Voting, Page 2

## Aurora cracks down on illegal fireworks

By Steve Lord  
Beacon-News

With the Fourth of July weekend coming up, Aurora’s crack-down on illegal fireworks throughout the city has begun.

Under the slogan, “If you light it, we’ll write it,” the campaign has started to try to quell the number of scofflaws who set off their illegal fireworks throughout the city.

According to a city news release this week, by city code, fireworks are illegal, and the selling, possession, storage and usage of fireworks now come with hefty fines.

In October 2021, the City Council approved changes to the city’s ordinances to add a level of enforcement against users of illegal fireworks.

Once the province solely of the police and fire departments, the city’s inspection crew, through the Property Standards Division, can now get involved in a process in which people can swear out complaints after the fact.

If someone sees fireworks lit, and can get a photo or pinpoint where they came from, that person can swear out a complaint through the city’s website portal, or by calling the customer service center.

That number is 630-256-4636, and the report can be submitted during or after the offense. Residents also can report illegal fireworks through the city’s website at [www.aurora-il.org/ReportFireworks](http://www.aurora-il.org/ReportFireworks).

The normal 911 emergency number should be called if the situation threatens the safety of people or property.

The new level of enforcement requires people signing affidavits against a violator.

Under the new rules, the administrative hearing officer would have the power to levy a fine of between \$250 to \$1,000, depending on things such as what fireworks were used, where they were used and how often offenders have been using fireworks.

The new ordinance now allows owners of the properties where illegal fireworks use occurs to be fined, and liens can be placed on the property for repeated offenses.

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## St. Charles self-guided history walk brought ‘into the 21st century’

Information now on app

By David Sharos  
For Beacon-News

Those looking to enjoy a walking tour of historic downtown St. Charles can now experience it in a new way, thanks to an upgraded self-guided program that has been produced by the St. Charles Business Alliance and the St. Charles History Museum.

The 27-stop tour can now be downloaded using the free Travel St. Charles app that is available in both the Apple and Android formats.

Previously, those taking the

tour relied on metal signs located outside each of the buildings on the tour to provide information about each location.

Now, according to Jenna Sawicki, executive director of the St. Charles Business Alliance, that information is available through a newly-developed feature which can be read by users right on the app or read out loud to them with narration provided by St. Charles Museum Executive Director Lindsay Judd.

“We developed the Travel St. Charles app less than a year ago and you can use it for all sorts of things,” Sawicki said. “There are business listings or it categor-

izes various types of food — you can type in ‘Italian’ and it will tell you all the options you have in St. Charles. We now have these tours that are on the app including our historical walking tour which started about five years ago, a collaboration between us and the history museum.”

Sawicki called the new app feature “a revamp — making something digital” in an effort to make the tour more technologically accessible.

“These days if you don’t have something on your phone, it might not be real,” she said. “We added the tour last week. People can see all the landmarks and it’s a



Historic Minard Hall at 201 E. Main St. is one of 27 stops visitors can make on a historical walking tour of downtown St. Charles now available on a downloadable app. DAVID SHAROS/BEACON-NEWS

way to bring the tour into the 21st century.”

Sawicki said there is no information about the number of people taking the tour each year but thanks to the new addition to the Travel St. Charles app “we’ll be able to track that.”

“We should have that informa-

tion soon and we’ll be excited to share that information and see what people’s interest is,” she said.

To download the free app, visit the Google Play or the App Store and search for Travel St. Charles.

David Sharos is a freelance reporter for The Beacon-News.

# Abortion travel benefits at issue

Companies offering employees help with reproductive health services may face challenges

By Sarah Freishtat  
Chicago Tribune

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to undo Roe v. Wade and end federal protections for abortion has propelled companies into the issue of reproductive freedom, with some employers around the country saying they will cover expenses when workers travel to get an abortion.

The topic has taken on heightened importance for Illinois, whose role as a haven of legal abortion care in the Midwest is likely to be amplified as other nearby states have, or are expected to, ban or significantly limit abortion access. Terminating a pregnancy is enshrined in Illinois state law as a "fundamental right."

But for workers in the roughly half of the states that are expected to curtail or ban abortion, two law professors said plans to cover travel costs to undergo the procedure could face headwinds.

Executives at Bolingbrook-based Ulta Beauty said the company would provide travel expense assistance for "eligible reproductive health services where access to care is restricted," including legal abortions. The coverage took effect Friday, the same day as the Supreme Court ruling, according to a company statement.

"As always, we encourage our teams and our guests to learn more and act on issues important to them by making their voice heard and their vote count," company executives said in a statement.

Banking giant JPMorgan Chase will also cover travel to receive legal abortions, according to a company benefits memo sent June 1.

JPMorgan has long covered abortion under a health insurance plan, and also covered travel for certain health care services. In July the travel coverage is set to expand to all health care services that can only be obtained far from home, including, for some, legal abortion.

Spokespeople for Ulta Beauty and JPMorgan Chase declined to specify how many employees could be eligible for the policies because they live in states that restrict abortions.

Among the other companies that said they would cover employee travel costs are The Walt Disney Co., Facebook parent Meta, American Express, Bank of America and Goldman Sachs. Companies like Apple, Starbucks, Lyft and Yelp reiterated after Friday's ruling previous statements taking similar action. Outdoor clothing maker Patagonia posted on LinkedIn Friday that it would provide "training and bail for those who peacefully protest for reproductive justice" and time off to vote.

Chicago-based United Airlines said in a memo to employees that its benefit policies did not change as a result of the Supreme Court ruling. The company's medical plans cover reproductive health care. In an email to the Tribune, spokeswoman Christine Salamone said employees can fly on United for free.

Chicago-based McDonald's did not respond Monday to a Tribune question about its policies. Associated Press reported the company also did not respond to a request from the news organization Friday, and neither did dozens of other big businesses.

## Crosby

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Moore, whose medical condition makes it hard for him to also tolerate many chemicals, knows time is running short. Subsidized housing has a one- to three-year waiting list, he said. And because he has no car or computer, finding an affordable replacement has been as futile as it has been frustrating.

"There is just too much need out there," Moore said, noting how "the food pantries are mobbed with a lot of new people."

Supply chain issues and rising labor costs are also affecting pantry budgets. For example, the pantry's cost for a single can of vegetables has doubled in the last couple of years, noted Renner, going from 13 cents to 26 cents.

Which means, she added, "we have to be a lot smarter" in how the food is purchased.

And how it is distributed.

Marie Wilkinson is not only making great use of the produce grown in its garden, but now does its own composting, as well as using this garden and greenhouse space to conduct healthy eating/cooking sessions for guests as they wait for the pantry to open.

The Health Sense class, Renner promised, is but one of the current and near-future programs her pantry is developing that will offer so much more than food on the shelf for those struggling during tough times.

At Aurora Interfaith, the big news is that, after being written into the next state budget for the first time in the pantry's 41-year history, the nonprofit will receive \$350,000 in funding.

According to Marketing Manager Alyssa Edwards, the money will be used to purchase a vehicle for its free mobile programs for women, children and seniors; as well as air-conditioning for the storage warehouse; a new refrigerated truck for its food recovery pickups; and other capital and techno-

logical improvements.

Rising grocery costs, the pandemic and current inflation have had a "massive impact" on our community, noted state Sen. Linda Holmes, D-Aurora, who, along with state Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, D-Oswego, helped secure the grant.

Which means more people have no choice but to rely on food pantries. In April there were 450 new families added to the Interfaith list, according to Edwards; in May, there were another 299 and in June, 167 were added.

Included in those statistics are people like Luis Megia, who lost his restaurant job during the pandemic, but bounced back to become a diesel mechanic until a truck fell out of a jack and nearly crushed him beneath a wheel in November.

Because the company provided no benefits, that accident, combined with inflationary prices, sent the 43-year-old man back to the Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry a couple months ago after his savings ran out.

And that's made a huge difference in his ability to "hang in there" until he's able to return to work, he told me.

"The pantry has really helped a lot," Megia said, "especially because I'm home and can use the produce we get to cook healthy meals."

While the number of people served has not reached the statistics at the height of the pandemic, Renner told me that, at the rate it is going now, "we will be there before the end of the year."

Shannon Cameron, executive director of Interfaith, sees the same writing on the wall.

In a press release expressing gratitude for the state funding, she acknowledged how "more and more people are turning to local food pantries to feed their families."

"Almost every day we are signing up 20 new families," she said, then added, "the end is not in sight."

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# Armanetti

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 <p><b>Topo Chico Hard Seltzer Variety Packs</b></p> <p><b>\$11.99</b> 12 PKS</p> <p style="background-color: yellow; font-weight: bold;">AFTER \$3 INSTANT SAVINGS</p>	 <p><b>Vizzy Hard Seltzer Variety Packs</b></p> <p><b>\$11.99</b> 12 PKS</p> <p style="background-color: yellow; font-weight: bold;">AFTER \$5 INSTANT SAVINGS</p>
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