

## Hygiene Pantry honored for unique service

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"In a give-and-take world, the St. Luke's Hygiene Pantry is in the business of the former. Now, the givers are getting their due.

The pantry, located in the old St. Luke's Lutheran Church building on North Street, received the Betty Pitzer Meritorious Service Award from Elderly United of Springfield and Clark County Inc. at the agency's annual volunteer luncheon last week. The award, in its ninth year, recognizes an organization that has provided outstanding service to the community's older adult population.

The hygiene pantry is devoted to the collection and distribution of personal care items and household cleaning supplies for elderly and homebound or disabled people throughout the county. Financial circumstances or other matters sometimes prevent people from purchasing such items, and the pantry fills the void.

"The pantry is unique to our area," said Ann Lite, director of Elderly United's Coordinated Assessments and Resources for the Elderly program. "These people have done some very nice things for the seniors in the community."

Things began in 1995 when Louis Voight, a retired librarian from Wittenberg University, started a book exchange for the St. Luke's Lutheran Mission. Through the efforts of several area churches, it developed into the pantry in 2000.

Earl Detrich replaced Voight as the pantry's director after Voight had health problems. Detrich is assisted by Jack Seipel.

The pantry is modeled on an operation in Dayton that since has closed. The Springfield-based one is going strong.

Unlike a food bank, Detrich said the pantry is unique in that it does not deal directly with the people it serves, but exclusively through caregivers and visiting nurses, some who deal with as many as 10 clients a week. About 140 caregivers are in touch with the pantry, which is open 1-3 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and has a staff of 32 volunteers.

"It's people helping people," said Detrich. "We like to call it a clearing house for hygiene products."

Available items include personal hygiene products such as soap or shampoo as well as household items such as canes or crutches.

Funds for the supplies come from a variety of sources. This lifts a burden from some of the caregivers.

"I know at least one of our caregivers was buying brooms and cleaning supplies out of her own pocket," said Lite.

Detrich said the pantry served more than 1,000 people in 2001.

The pantry has grown in clientele 15-20 percent a year. As long as it doesn't grow too much more, Detrich said he hopes word of mouth will allow the facility to help even more individuals.

"It's good to know there's help available if you know where to look," he said.