

Turkey Week Is Here At Last

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

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Turkey Week was here at last. At 9 am on Monday, Nov. 18 when the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) food distribution center opened, the line of clients with shopping bags, rolling carts and extra hands was already down the block. Jolie Smith, AFAC chief development officer said, “Normally there is a line down the block but when it’s Turkey Week, it doesn’t stop.”

The needy families who come to AFAC for supplemental groceries receive a protein selection, eggs, milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, beans or pasta and a choice of canned staples. But during Turkey Week, they also receive a turkey or a chicken.

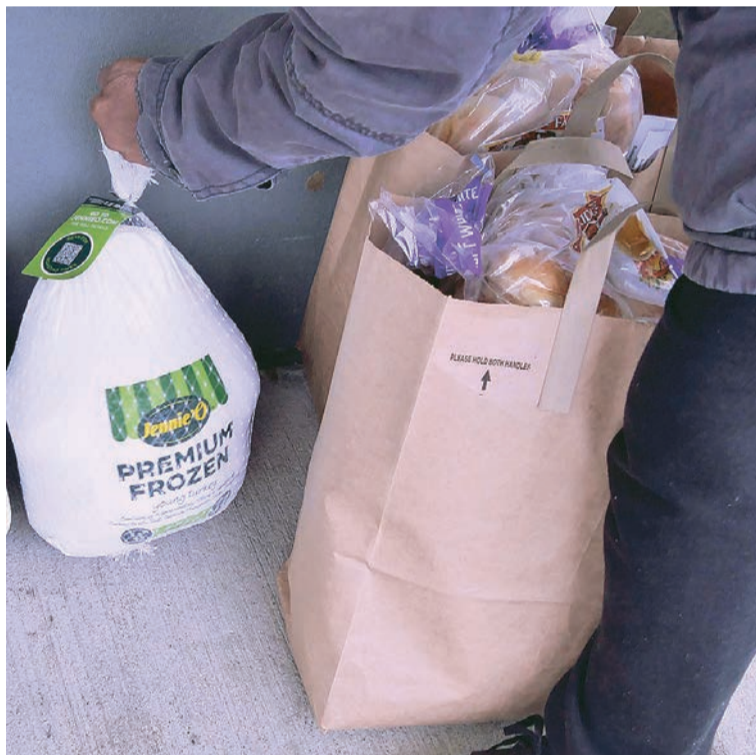
Charlie Meng, CEO of AFAC, says the number of families served by AFAC has soared to 4,000 weekly, the highest ever, and AFAC ordered 3,900 turkeys and 500 chickens this year. He explained that many older people prefer chickens because they are easier to handle. And the good news is that Turkey Week is actually giving out turkeys again this year since last year due to financial constraints everyone received a chicken instead. But Meng explains that turkeys are \$1.01 cent a pound cheaper this year than last.

Due to the pressures of the economy and increasing number of families served, AFAC has been overspending its budget in the last couple of years. Meng says that he wrote to the County Board in early October 2024 with an update out-

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Charlie Meng, CEO of AFAC, lays out the need for additional assistance to support the unprecedented number of families served. Jasper, Assistant to the Director for Staff Morale, was at home the day of the interview and unable to appear in the picture with his favorite fetch toy.



The last person in line at Thursday’s Turkey Week gathers up her bag of supplemental groceries and her heavy Thanksgiving turkey.



Jolie Smith, chief development officer, and Alana Rafiee, marketing and communications director, gather a box of bananas, heavier than it looks.



Every family gets a bag with milk, eggs, bread, choice of protein, beans or pasta, and fresh produce on a weekly basis.

Meng Honored as Community Leader of the Year

Charles Meng, CEO of Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), was presented the Community Leader of the Year Award by the Inter-Service Club Council at the Washington Golf and Country Club on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

Jeff Englander, head of the Arlington Optimist Club, presented the award to Meng for Meng’s 17 years of service and his efforts in the community to spotlight the needs of those in financial distress. Englander pointed out that AFAC had served 600 families a week when it started and now it has expanded to a full

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blown logistical operation serving 4,000 a week.

Meng received a standing ovation from the packed crowd of community supporters and businesses and said afterwards, “It made me realize how much AFAC means to the community.”

Matt de Ferranti was present representing the Arlington County Board. He explained later, “I am honored and grateful to work with him. Charlie is a great leader. He is

Charles Meng, CEO of Arlington Food Assistance Center receives Community Leader of the Year Award.

inclusive and fully committed to serving those in need.” De Ferranti adds, “His good data and detailed approach allowed us to give AFAC additional close out money from our 2024 County funds which is not typical for the Board.”

The Inter-Service Club Council of Arlington was founded in 1940 as a clearinghouse for service organizations. From its founding until 2022 it awarded an annual Man of the Year and a Woman of the Year Award. In 2023 they established the single Community Leader Award.

— SHIRLEY RUHE