

SULTAN FOOD BANK: Charity Thrives in Sultan

[Carolyn Eslick's initiating letter to the Editors](#) of both the Herald and the Monroe Monitor, has generated a good deal of controversy on the subject of whether or not Sultan can afford to keep feeding the homeless, elicited responses. Mrs. Eslick is a former Sultan councilwoman and president of the Sultan Food Bank. Her question, "Should we stop feeding the homeless?" and entreaty, "Let's discuss the issue," focuses a long-needed spotlight on the issue of Sultan's Blue Tent community which has grown just outside of the Sultan city limits, south of the Skykomish River along Skyview Drive.

I agree with Carolyn. In fact, I think we need to address this issue head-on, with all parties coming to the table: Area residents, business owners, affected officials of both the county and city, and residents of both the Blue Tent and surrounding area communities need to establish guidelines and mutual responsibilities for both parties in the future.

The challenge of meeting the needs of the disenfranchised (whether via their choice or a condition that has been imposed upon them in some manner), as Carolyn rightly pointed out, has become so large that it has moved out of the shadows of a city underpass and has landed, literally, on our doorsteps. And because the economic gap clearly continues to widen between the haves and have-nots in America, this problem will only grow larger as, and if, we continue turning a blind eye.

I believe Carolyn has placed Sultan -- perhaps unwittingly -- in the position of leader in trying to find some creative methods by which we, can deal more effectively with our current, and future, challenge. Understanding and a mutual dialogue, with expected responsibilities on *both* sides of this issue is needed.

Julie Morris' Herald Letter to the Editor: "PURPOSE IS TO HELP ANYONE IN NEED"

This is a statement regarding Carolyn Eslick's questions as to whether the Sultan Food Bank should continue to serve the homeless in its town ("Sultan food bank: Should donation policy be changed?" Nov. 19).

First and foremost, most food banks' mission statements read something similar to "Provide food to those in need while preserving the dignity of those we help." I say, stick to your mission. Ask yourselves why was this food bank started in the first place? Is it simply because people need food to survive, and/or we don't want our neighbors-in-need to go without food?

I don't think anyone who has ever started a food bank or continues to run one should ever get into the business of determining who is or isn't deserving of getting food to eat. If a food bank quits giving food on purpose, basically, it would be choosing to starve people to death, which is reprehensible. What is just as reprehensible is your donors and other city officials or leaders putting the burden of their homeless on the food bank's shoulders. It absolutely should not be the volunteers' burden to try to determine if a person has alcohol on his/her breath.

The only time to turn a human being away from a food source is if they are causing a disturbance or are a threat to the people around them. I understand that some people may feel the food banks are "enabling" people to continue to live their lives in a fashion that is not acceptable to the general public. Well, it still isn't the food bank's mission or job to get involved

in that area of other people's lives! That's why there are other resource centers available. The food bank's purpose is simply to give food to those in need to reduce hunger. Period.

Good luck, Carolyn and all involved, who have sustained your food bank's success. And may the presumed "burden" of what should concern a whole city not be solely placed on your food bank's shoulders!

JULIE MORRIS
Sky Valley Food Bank
Monroe

John Dick's Letter to the *Herald*: "DON'T TURN AWAY ANY HUMAN BEING"

The Sultan food bank, or any other food bank, should never turn any member of the human race away. I know some of these men who are homeless. I have been to City Council meetings and heard our City Council talk about these men like they were stray dogs. They are people, with names and stories to tell. Some are American veterans. They are members of the same race as those who complain about them - the human race.

Some of these homeless men will take their VA check and buy food and donate it to the food bank via store collection boxes. Without saying a word. They never complain about community members who want them gone.

When will this so-called Christian nation live up to its creed, "that all men are created equal?"

When do we stop judging people by how they look or where they live?

When do we start caring for our own brothers and sisters?

When do we stop asking God to bless our nation, and realize that he/she already has?

There will be more poor and homeless people as the world gets smaller. There will be more people going to food banks, too. To profile people and turn them away because of the way they live is not right. Who is to say you won't be next?

I know if these few homeless people were stray dogs we could call someone and people would take care of them and make sure they got a good home and food. Why we cannot do that for our fellow human beings in this country, I don't know.

John Dick
Sultan

THE EVERETT HERALD'S DECEMBER 4, 2004 ARTICLE ON THIS SUBJECT:

**By Yoshiaki Nohara
Herald Writer**

**"FOOD BANK FEELS PRESSURE
SOME WORRY SULTAN GROUP HELPS THE HOMELESS TOO MUCH"**

SULTAN - Like other food banks, the Sultan Food Bank's policy is simple: "Feed the hungry in Sky Valley," said Carolyn Eslick, the food bank's president.

But the food bank has been under pressure recently to stop feeding some homeless people. A number of residents say some homeless people remain in Sultan because the food bank feeds them, Eslick said.

Food bank representatives in other areas of Snohomish County say feeding the homeless is part of their basic mission. Peg Amarok, administrator of the Lynnwood Food Bank, said it serves anyone, including six to 10 homeless families each week.

"They deserve as much help as everyone else does," said Amarok, who has been with the food bank for about 20 years.

"Refusing to feed anybody is against our policy," she said.

The Sky Valley Food Bank in Monroe feels the same way, director Julie Morris said.

"It's our duty to give food - period," she said, adding that the Monroe food bank probably doesn't have as many homeless clients as Sultan.

The food bank in Sultan served those without addresses about 28 times in November, Eslick said. That's a small portion of the clients, because the food bank feeds about 1,750 people each month, she added.

There are two types of homeless people in town: those who become transients due to circumstances, and those who become so by choice, Sultan Police Chief Fred Walser said.

Those belonging to the latter group tend to live in a blue-tarp community across the Skykomish River in the Skyview Drive area. They have caused problems in town with aggressive panhandling, prostitution, drinking and drug use, which drains law enforcement resources, Walser said.

In the past, a handful of those homeless people who were drunk or using drugs caused disturbances at the food bank, Eslick said. But food bank volunteers can now turn away people with alcohol on their breath or if drug use is apparent, she said.

Those people who are homeless by choice may be taking food bank resources from those in real need, Walser said.

As a result, the food bank, which counts on donations to operate, has been losing some funding pledges, Eslick said. The food bank's annual budget is about \$20,000.

"We all have, depending on our own personal experiences, feelings on how we take care of each other," Eslick said, adding that the food bank board would like to hear from the public on the issue.

The food bank may create a new policy to refer new clients and clients without addresses to other assistance resources rather than just giving them food, Eslick said.

"It will give them tools. Whether they will use them or not, it's up to them," she said.

Karen Buchanan, 58, is one person who uses the Sultan Food Bank every week. Out of work for medical reasons and not old enough to receive Social Security, Buchanan said small things - free cans of beans, day-old bread and coffee - help her a lot.

Buchanan, who lives with her 16-year-old daughter in town, said she is grateful for the food bank, where volunteers treat her with respect. "If it wasn't here, maybe my quality of life would be a little bit different," she said Friday outside the food bank on First Street.

Buchanan added that the food bank should feed anyone, including the homeless.

Even if they are drunk or high on drugs?

She paused.

"I don't know," she said.

Reporter Yoshiaki Nohara: 425-339-3029 or ynohara@ heraldnet.com