

Moving to meet needs

BOUNTY & SOUL FINDS TEMPORARY LOCATION TO ACCOMMODATE GROWING DEMAND FOR FOOD

Fred McCormick

The Valley Echo



Bounty & Soul volunteers and staff greet patrons of the organization's mobile market in the parking lot at 205 N.C. 9 on April 21. The Black Mountain-based nonprofit, which provides fresh produce free of charge, is hosting two weekly markets at the location throughout the duration of the COVID-19 crisis in response to an increase in demand for its services. *Fred McCormick*

As the COVID-19 public health crisis continues to cause economic hardships for people unable to work during the pandemic, Bounty & Soul is finding a way to

anyone who needs it through its Produce to the People mobile market, has expanded its operation to accommodate a growing number of people seeking its services.

A long line of cars wrapped around the former Bi LO building on 205 N.C. 9, April 21, as Bounty & Soul entered its second week of hosting drive-through markets in the parking lot. The decision to move its two weekly markets to the space was in response to a massive increase in demand, according to founder and executive director Ali Casparian.

“The demand has definitely gone up and it continues to climb,” she said. “We have seen a 300% increase. Where we usually served 800 - 850 people a week, pre-COVID, we are now serving over 2,400 people a week at our drive-through markets.”

In response to the crisis, Bounty & Soul modified its markets in March, consolidating its five weekly offerings into two, hosted at a pair of local churches. The combination of an influx of traffic experienced during the pandemic and social distancing measures made it necessary to find a larger venue to host the markets on a temporary basis. Casparian identified the space left vacant when the grocery store closed in 2018 as an ideal location.



“I reached out to some folks I knew that worked closely with the Town of Black Mountain to navigate how we would get who we would need to contact,” she said. “Mayor (Don) Collins got involved and was able to find the investment firm that bought it and get a tentative agreement.”

Once the agreement was finalized, the nonprofit held its first market in the new location on April 14.

Bounty & Soul plans to host the markets every Tuesday from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. and Fridays from 4 - 6 p.m. throughout the duration of the COVID-19 crisis. The format will remain identical to the drive-through markets the organization had been holding at the churches.

“Our Bounty & Soul truck is there and is acting as storage for our tables, tents and the pre-bagged foods,” Casparian said. “The food is being sorted, processed and packaged at two offsite locations — Christmount and St. James Episcopal Church — and then shuttled over.”

While the markets typically experience a spike in traffic within the first 40 minutes of opening, according to Casparian, the supply is sufficient to serve clients through the duration of each market.



“We are open for two hours and are able to give the last person what we gave the first person,” she said. “Spreading the time out when people arrive will help keep the traffic under control and us able to continue to be there as the numbers increase.”

Fundraising for the nonprofit’s Impact Fund continues to be a priority for Bounty & Soul as the number of area residents utilizing the service is expected to grow.

“There are many private donors, foundations, businesses, organizations and funders that understand the brevity of the health as well as the economic crisis that is at hand and recognize that what we are doing and how we are doing it matters and they have given generously,” Casprian said. “We have received emergency grant funding from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, WNC Bridge Foundation and Dogwood Health Trust, as well as from many family foundations. We are incredibly grateful for the outpouring of generosity and support.”

Bounty & Soul is sourcing and distributing nearly 20,000 pounds of food each week, according to Casprian, and remains committed to supporting local farmers, growers and other businesses.

“We need to come together as a community, as a nation, as a world to value and support a sustainable and resilient food system,” she said.



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