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<a href="#">Herndon Observer</a>	<a href="#">Reston Observer</a>			<a href="#">Eastern Loudoun Observer</a>	



August 4, 2000

[Business & Services](#)

[Viewpoints](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Weddings](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Senior Focus](#)

[Cookbook](#)

[Community Guide](#)

[Archives](#)

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## LINK Receives National Award for Fighting Hunger

By [Liz Crotty](#)   
**Observer Staff Writer**

LINK, a local organization serving the needy in Sterling, Ashburn and Herndon, last week was one of only 15 organizations across the country selected to receive the Victory Against Hunger Award.

The all-volunteer, non-profit group was nominated by U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA-10) for the award and will receive a \$1,000 grant underwritten by Victory Wholesale Grocers. The money will be used to improve LINK's phone system and increase provisions to local residents in crisis.

"It is an achievement," said LINK vice president Joyce Trickett. "We feel very fortunate to have been considered, and we're elated that we won."

The award is the first national recognition for LINK, which was established in 1972 to support Eastern Loudoun County. The group spread to Herndon in 1975, and in 1978 it was chartered as a non-profit organization.

LINK, an acronym originally designed to stand for "Loudoun Interdenominational Network for Karing," is supported by 17 local churches and provides assistance to more than 1,000 families each year.

That assistance comes mainly in the form of free food, but the organization also provides needy residents with furniture, clothing, and presents for the holidays. Items are donated to the organization by the participating churches and by local grocery stores, businesses and residents.

The Victory Against Hunger Award, created seven years ago by Victory Wholesale Grocers and the Congressional Hunger Center, works to reward anti-hunger organizations in the country that have been effective in fighting hunger in their communities.

This year, the selection committee specifically looked to reward food banks that had implemented "innovative methods to improve the transportation of food to the hungry," according to the Congressional

Archives

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[Advanced](#)

Hunger Center.

LINK volunteers personally deliver food to families in the area free of charge, a service that is especially valuable to senior citizens or invalids who are unable to leave their homes, said Carol Lavery, president of LINK.

“You know you’re directly helping the needy,” she said. “There’s no overhead, and it’s 100 percent volunteers. You actually bring food right to their doors.”

In the eight years that she has worked with LINK, Lavery, a member of Herndon United Methodist Church, said she has seen a wide variety of local residents seeking assistance, from new families struggling to afford the high cost of living in the area to residents whose pocketbooks have been drained by high medical bills.

Trickett, a member of Dranesville Church of the Brethren who has also volunteered with LINK for eight years, said some people are forced to choose between taking medication for illness and eating a meal. “Many times I can’t believe how desperate they are,” she said. “Hunger is all year long, not just at Christmastime and Thanksgiving.”

LINK operates a voice-mail box, from which a food coordinator retrieves food request messages from local residents. Messages from Spanish-speaking individuals are relayed to Spanish-speaking LINK volunteers, who act as translators.

Applicants requesting food are interviewed to determine their financial situation, number of family members and whether they qualify for the LINK service.

Lavery said the qualification standards are “pretty lenient,” but the organization asks for a referral from a social worker, pastor or school counselor.

If the applicant qualifies, a volunteer packs the food and positions it at LINK’s pantry, located at a Herndon church, to be picked up. The volunteer then calls a church representative on duty for that time period with the applicant’s name, address and telephone number. As the final step in the process, another volunteer is contacted, who calls the applicant and schedules a time for delivery, which is usually within 24 hours of the request.

The applicant is provided with a week’s supply of non-perishable food, along with certificates for each member of the family to purchase perishable food at local grocery stores. LINK volunteers also work to coordinate needy residents with the Loudoun and Fairfax departments of social services for further assistance.

Last year, LINK delivered food to 574 families in the area, or 2,482 people. In addition, 431 families, or 2,092 people, received holiday boxes of food, coats and toys during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

LINK uses any excess funds during the year for emergency financial assistance to families referred by a social worker or LINK-sponsored church clergy. The organization also donates money to the Northern Virginia Family Service, a non-profit organization supporting the needy in Herndon, and the Loudoun County Department of Social Services.

The group also makes quarterly monetary donations to the Good Shepherd Alliance, an emergency homeless shelter in Loudoun County. LINK volunteers are encouraged to help out at The Closet in Herndon and the Good Shepherd Thrift Store in Sterling, which in turn provide LINK customers with low-cost or free clothing.

The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that in 1999, 25 million people in the U.S. were in households that experienced hunger or lacked suitable nourishment.

Even as the median income swells in the Northern Virginia area, there are still thousands of families for whom an empty kitchen cupboard is an all-too-frequent sight, Trickett said. "Each person is number-one to us."

For more information, call the LINK pantry at 703-437-1776 or visit <http://hometown.aol.com/linkvirginia>.

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[Back to top](#) | [Back to previous page](#)

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