



Phyllis Friend, left, and Amelia Cox assist a shopper with their grocery needs.

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Catholic Charities Helping Center can provide help to those in need



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Pam Wemhaner, manager of Catholic Charities Helping Center in Sallisaw.

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What at one time may have been an enjoyable endeavor has oftentimes become a dreaded venture of necessity in today's stressful economic times.

For instance, a trip to the neighborhood grocery store these days — once an opportunity to fill a shopping cart with a wide variety of items to provide nutritional meals as a labor of love for the family — is a cruel reminder of how far a dollar no longer stretches.

But there are community resources available for those in need.

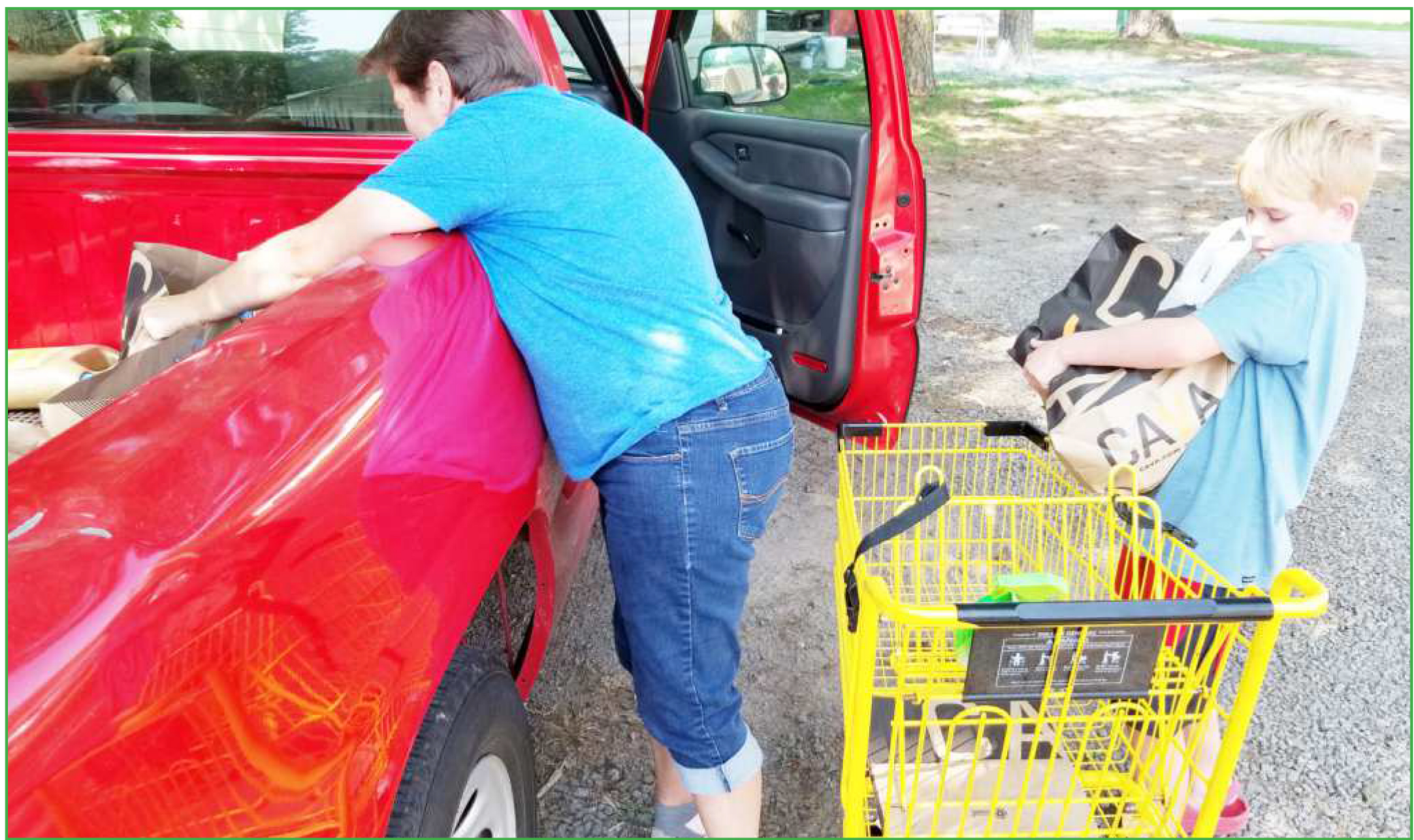
"The way things are changing with our economy and food supplies and all that kind of stuff, we keep hearing day after day 'Everything's so expensive, I just can't afford it, I just can't afford it,'" says Pam Wemhaner,

manager of Catholic Charities Helping Center.

But the message Wemhaner has for those faced with limited resources is a simple one. "We can help. We are here. We have food. We still have supply issues, too, but we've got a relative abundance of food. We want people to know that we can help. We can supplement their food stamps. We can supplement their food supply so that their income goes further."

And Wemhaner says it's a relatively easy, non-threatening process for those who need help.

"There are no judgments," she emphasizes to allay any fears and remove any obstacles. "We're going to ask some questions, but we're not going to judge you. So if you walk in here and you're filthy dirty, we're go-



Andrew Cox assists a shopper with loading items into their vehicle.

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ing to try to get you some clothes. We're going to try to help you. We do our best to try to help people and relieve their suffering. Our mission is to be Christ's merciful love to those who suffer. So we try to reach out and be the hands and feet of Christ so that we can actually lift them out of the terrible situation they might be in, at least a little bit anyway."

The Catholic Charities Helping Center, located at 409 N. Adams Street in Sallisaw, is open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Wemhaner and her staff are available to help.

"They just need to come to our door and they do need to bring identification and proof that they

live in our community — a utility bill is usually what they use, but it could be a doctor's statement ... we're pretty lenient about that.

"During those times, people can come and get food, and they can also shop for clothing — when I say 'shop,' they come in, they can get clothes, it doesn't cost them anything. They can also obtain household goods. If they need sheets or blankets, small appliances or dishes, we've got some of that kind of stuff. We also have some limited financial resources to help with bills for utilities that might be getting cut off. We've got a wide range of services that we have available," Wemhaner says.

Wemhaner is concerned that there are segments of the Sequoyah County population that don't take advantage of the resources offered by the Catholic

Charities Helping Center.

"One thing that we've noticed, we're not reaching the Black population. We have a sample of folks who are people of color, but we want them to know that we're here. We can help."

But what if those in need are not Catholic?

"Don't be afraid to come to us if you're not Catholic," Wemhaner says. "A lot of people think you can't come here unless you are Catholic. I've heard it said, 'I thought you had to be Catholic to go there.' No, that's not true. Everyone is welcome regardless of religious affiliation. Ninety-eight percent of the people who use our services are not Catholic. We're here for everybody. Cherokees are welcome. Atheists are welcome. Anybody who wants to come here are welcome. So come and see us."