

# *Charities* and Nonprofits



Feeding families is just the beginning, Circle of Concern strives to strengthen the community one neighbor at a time.

Become a part of its mission by attending an event, hosting a food drive or making a donation. "Donated foods comprise more than \$1 million of our community budget, so community food drives are so important for us," executive director Cyndi Miller says. Above photo: Cyndi Miller, Executive Director, Circle Of Concern; Ryan and Dana Dean, KSDK News Channel 5; Steve and Debbie Ernst, 50th Anniversary Gala Co-Chairs. Stop by 112 St. Louis Ave., in Valley Park, call 636-861-2623 or visit [circleofconcern.org](http://circleofconcern.org) to learn more.



CIRCLE OF CONCERN FOOD PANTRY

# MEASURING THE *Quality* OF A COMMUNITY

By Amanda Dahl  
Photo by Sarah Conroy

Michelle Lepak, pantry director; Bobbie Siesennop, volunteer

How a community treats those who are in need can be its measure of success and longevity. With organizations like Circle Of Concern around, optimism pervades in St. Louis County. "We have been a beacon of hope for struggling families and have helped tens of thousands of people over the last 50 years," executive director Cyndi Miller says. "So often, when we are out in the community doing a talk about Circle, someone pulls us aside afterward to say, 'You helped us when my husband lost his job' or 'my dad left.' A woman recently shared that ten years ago her daughter got a scholarship through Circle, and now, she's got a great job that she loves. We hear these things so frequently, and it just makes it clear we are doing the right thing."

The food pantry contributes much more to the community than simply providing meals to families in need. The organization works to keep families safe and together through numerous initiatives. "We assist about 1,200 households annually and feed approximately 2,000 people monthly," Miller states.

"We provide kid-friendly foods, personal care items, school supplies, and we assist with rent and utilities. Our trained volunteers offer one-on-one coaching and career mentorship; this is an evidence-based, best-practice approach in the pantry world."

This hands-on practice demonstrates the strength of a community when its people come together to help one another. "The people we serve are really our neighbors. Avoid stereotypes about those who reach out to us. So many of them have done what they were supposed to do in life. They went to school, got jobs, paid their bills ... but something happened along the way. They got sick or had to quit work to care for a sick child, or the money they make just isn't enough. Seventy-six percent of the households we serve make less than \$25,000 a year," Miller explains. "In a perfect world, families wouldn't need Circle any longer. Until then, we hope our community will continue to support us in the way they have for the last 50 years." 🍌

Circle of Concern Food Pantry, 112 St. Louis Ave.,  
Valley Park, 636-861-2623, [circleofconcern.org](http://circleofconcern.org)

## WHAT/WHEN/WHERE

### 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

Nov. 4

Forest Hills Country Club

*The reception will feature live music by KMOX's Maria Keena and members of the Original Knights of Swing. KSDK's Dana and Ryan Dean will serve as Masters of Ceremonies. The dinner also will feature an auction run by auctioneer Shannon Mays. Make your reservation by calling 636-861-2623 or visiting [circleofconcern.org](http://circleofconcern.org).*