

# Food pantry expansion project begins

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Staff Writer

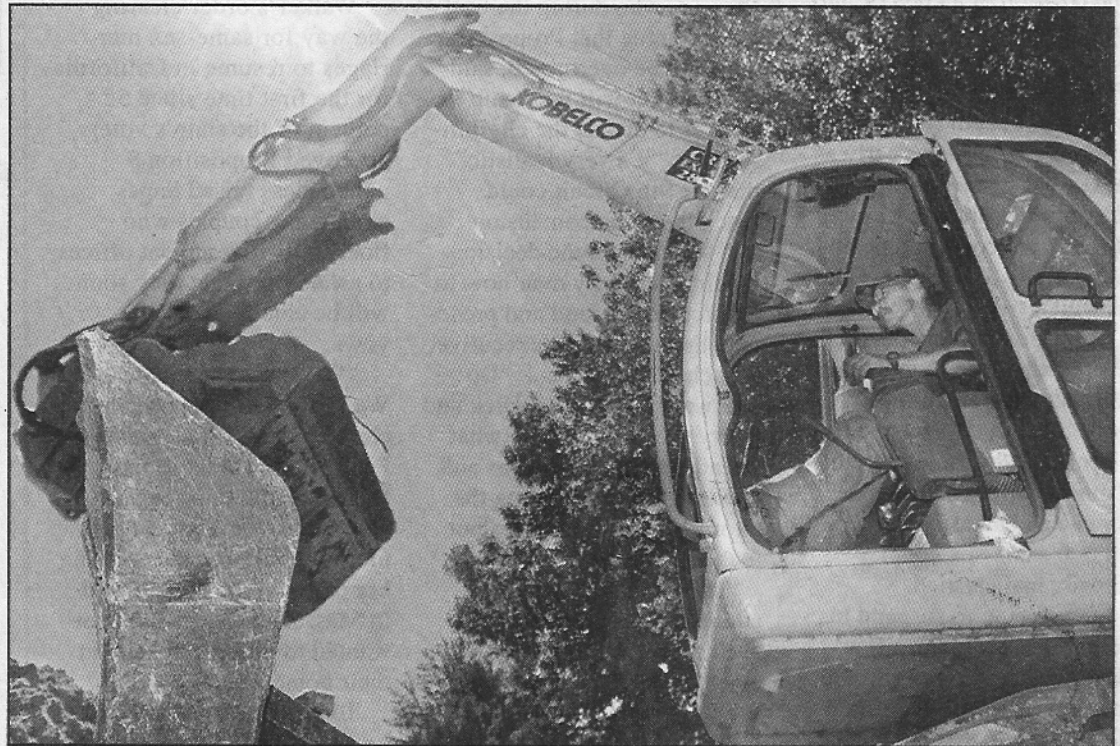
SACO — An expansion project for the Saco Bay Food Pantry is under way and will provide much needed room for a children's clothing distribution program and storage space for frozen foods.

The expansion is a project of the Saco Bay Rotary and the Biddeford and Saco Rotary clubs.

The project, in total, will cost about \$196,000. So far, the rotary clubs have raised \$116,000 in monetary and in-kind donations.

The response from the community has been great, and several local businesses have stepped up to offer their services to the project, said Saco Bay Rotarian Leo Menard.

"The minute you turn around, there's someone there to help,"



JEFF LAGASSE/Journal Tribune

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John Cote operates an excavator on Wednesday while filling dirt into the foundation of a new addition that is currently being added to the Saco Food Pantry on Ocean Park Road in Saco.

## Pantry

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he said.

Menard spearheaded the program after visiting Elaine Fournier, the founder of Open Hands, Open Heart, a children's clothing distribution program that was located in a trailer on the grounds of the food pantry, at 67 Ocean Park Road. After seeing how packed the trailer was, Menard went to the two rotaries and began the project.

"My immediate impression was, this is too small. She has six feet of clothes in an 8 foot wide trailer," said Menard.

Fournier began operating out of the trailer last October. She said she hoped to some day have a bigger space, but she didn't think it would come this soon. She said it's been amazing to see the project move forward so quickly with help from so many members of the community.

The new addition will greatly

increase Fournier's space to operate. She will move from an 8 by 24 foot trailer, to a 24 by 42 foot space with a 24 by 38 foot basement for storage.

Since Fournier began the program last year, she has received almost daily calls from people willing to donate items.

"We're not going to have any trouble filling the space. Not at all," said Fournier.

The new space will also provide room for items currently being stored in the homes of Fournier and others.

"I'll get my garage back," said Fournier.

The project also includes a storage freezer for the pantry.

The food pantry provides food for needy families in Saco, and in emergency cases, to those in Old Orchard Beach and Biddeford.

Currently, there is not enough space at the food pantry to hold its inventory of frozen food, which is stored in three different

locations, said Bob Nichols, director of pantry operations for the pantry.

Having a large storage freezer on the premises would be easier for volunteers, as the pantry would have its inventory on premises, and would decrease the miles racked up to get the food, said Nichols.

The Open Hands, Open Heart trailer has been moved across the street from the pantry while construction is taking place.

For more information on the Saco Food Pantry, visit [www.sacofoodpantry.org](http://www.sacofoodpantry.org). Those interested in donating to the project can call Menard at 229-7525 or e-mail at [lmenard@maine.rr.com](mailto:lmenard@maine.rr.com). Services needed include a vinyl siding contractor and help from a paving company to pave the parking lot.

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