



Fundraiser stocks base pantry on Cape Cod

Sheriff Cummings raises awareness over the challenges facing Cape military families and veterans



By **ROBERT GOLD**

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March 10, 2011 2:00 AM

HYANNIS — Stacks of spaghetti sauce, cereals, canned goods and more lined a hallway at the Cape Codder Resort Wednesday evening.

One floor below, dozens of people gathered, all determined to help a very specific group of people in need. Several of them took turns handing over checks to help Ma Otis's Pantry, an emergency food pantry for military families, veterans and civilian contractors at Otis Air National Guard Base.

The event was hosted by Barnstable County Sheriff James Cummings, who thanked the crowd for their generosity but urged people to keep donating.

"We need to keep the shelves filled," said Cummings, whose office has been donating items to the pantry for several months.

The pantry provides food and other products, including diapers. It started operating out of a room at the Coast Guard Chapel in December 2009. Before that, one of the pantry's co-founders, Jodi Fiske, would distribute supplies on the base out of the trunk of her car.

The pantry helps more than 200 families a year, said Michelle Atlak, president of the all-volunteer group.

Often families that have transferred from other parts of the country think they can survive on Cape Cod financially. They soon find out how tough it can be to get by in the area, Atlak said.

"They realize the cost of living is so much higher than other places they've come from," she said after the event.

The fundraiser marked the first public appearance of Jeffrey Perry in his new role as special sheriff, the second in command at the Barnstable Correctional Facility. The former Republican state representative from Sandwich started in late January.

Perry said he's enjoying the job and added that Cummings has a "great team."

He said Wednesday's event hopefully will raise awareness about the needs of military families.

When members of the military are serving overseas, they have plenty of things on their mind. For some, that includes whether their families back home have enough food and other supplies.

"It's something they should not have to worry about," Perry said.

The pantry spent about \$31,000 to help Otis families during its last fiscal year, Atlak said. Tuesday's event raised \$15,000 plus about \$6,000 worth of food and other supplies.

"The smile has not left my face," Atlak said in a telephone interview shortly after the fundraiser.

Those who are looking to donate supplies, volunteer or want more information about the program can contact Atlak at 508-524-8144.

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