

# A romantic Valentine's gift? Helping the needy

BY ERIKA CHAVEZ  
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As Valentine's Day approached, Irvine attorney Mike Carroll began thinking about what to give his wife, Betty.

In past years, gifts included jewelry, pajamas and expensive dinners at top-tier restaurants.

But this year, as they watched the economy crater and layoffs soar locally and nationally, such gifts seemed a little indulgent.

"We thought to ourselves, Valentine's Day is about showing one's heart to another person," said Carroll, who lives in Laguna Niguel and is a regular donor to the Orange County Rescue Mission and its spin-off, Village of Hope. "Why don't we take what money we would have spent on an expensive dinner or a piece of jewelry, and make a donation to the Village of Hope?"

While they're at it, the Carrolls will pack a box full of non-perishable food items and bring it to the Village of Hope in Tustin, which

houses 136 men, women and children as they transition from homelessness to education and employment.

"We call it a love box," Carroll said. "It's a gift of love, of things that are needed."

Officials from shelters and food banks throughout the county reported severe food and donation shortages over the holidays, even as demand for their services grew exponentially. Now the holidays are long gone, but the chronic shortage of food and other supplies to help the needy remains.

At the Village of Hope, officials are grappling with staggering needs: a shortage of 336 gallons of milk each month. A monthly deficit of 4,810 pounds of produce. And 1,450 pounds of canned vegetables that are necessary to feed the residents.

Officials hope that Orange County residents will follow the Carrolls' lead



"Valentine's Day is about showing your heart to another person," Mike Carroll said. He and his wife donated a food basket to the Village of Hope in Tustin. > PHOTOS BY ROSE PALMISANO/OCREGISTER.COM

## **i** HOW TO HELP

To donate: drop off "Love Boxes" filled with non-perishable food items at the Village of Hope warehouse, 1 Hope Drive, Tustin, Monday through Saturday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Call 714-247-4300 or visit [www.rescuemission.org](http://www.rescuemission.org) for more information.



Because more families are using the food pantry, the Village of Hope is running out of certain foods like canned vegetables.

and create "love boxes" of their own to donate to the Village of Hope. Non-perishable food items are welcome, as are online donations at [www.rescuemission.org](http://www.rescuemission.org).

As for the Carrolls, they are opting for a home-cooked meal this year: Mike's signature pepper-crusted filet

mignon with asparagus, at a fraction of the price of a restaurant meal.

"I hope other people follow and do something that for many of us isn't a big sacrifice," Carroll said. "You can have a wonderful, romantic evening at home and help the Rescue Mission at the same time."



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Mike Carroll,  
Irvine attorney



A teddy bear, soup and snacks are some of the Carrolls' donated items.

## By the numbers

The Orange County Rescue Mission has seen a 55 percent increase in requests for food and housing assistance in the last nine months. Some of the food shortages they are facing each month:

**336** gallons of milk  
**465** pounds of eggs  
**4,975** pounds of meat  
**2,700** pounds of starch (potatoes, pasta)  
**2,665** pounds of bread  
**4,810** pounds of produce  
**1,450** pounds of canned vegetables