

# LI Cares' mobile food pantry first of its kind

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Long Island Cares' new van carries kitchen staples, such as bags of rice and cans of beans. Also aboard is something found in no other mobile food pantry nationwide - applications for food stamps, with staff trained to speed enrollment.

Behind the driver's seat is an "office" with plush seats and a small table for discussions about government benefit

eligibility. In the very back, more than 500 pounds of food are waiting to be hauled away by needy families.

Coming to [Bellmore](#) next week, that combination of free food and professional help is the first of its kind, said Ross Fraser, a spokesman for [Feeding America](#), a network of 203 food banks - including Long Island Cares - in all 50 states. "No one else is doing it. We think it's a brilliant idea," Fraser said.

Unveiled at a news conference inside the Long Island Cares' [Hauppauge](#) headquarters Tuesday, the Mobile Outreach Resource Enterprise, or MORE van, will make its first community appearance in Bellmore next Tuesday outside [Nassau](#) Legis. David Denenberg's office at 2818 [Merrick](#) Rd. from noon to 3 p.m.

Staffing the van will be a Long Island Cares employee deputized to enroll people for food stamps and other government programs such as Medicaid, said Paule Pachter, the charity's executive director.

The charity hopes to help up to 3,000 people this year, securing benefits for up to 150, referring up to 400 to other agencies, and giving boxes of food to all, Pachter said. Between 25,000 and 35,000 pounds of food will be distributed.

The next stop after Bellmore will be the [West Islip](#) office of [Suffolk](#) Legis. Thomas Barraga, who said "it's a middle-class community but many of them are very hard-pressed."

Next month, Long Island Cares is launching a food pantry in [Freeport](#), its first outside of its warehouse. Pachter said the changes are driven by the stubbornly sluggish economy and high [unemployment](#), which has sent demand soaring at small food pantries struggling to handle the surge.

"It's not enough for us simply to deliver food right now," Pachter said. "Our pantries are under extreme demand but they don't have the ability to expand services."

A similar effort is under way at Long Island's other large food distributor, Island Harvest, which has begun educating food pantry volunteers about government programs, said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and chief executive.

[< back to article](#)