



Volunteer Ceil Belenardo, left, helps Claribel Sanabria of West Haven gather food at the WHEAT Food Pantry in West Haven on Tuesday.

Arnold Gold/Hearst Connecticut Media

‘People are in need’

Residents look for help at food pantries amid the SNAP benefits confusion

By Alex Putterman, Austin Mirmina, Jordan Nathaniel Fenster, Ken Dixon

STAFF WRITERS

Caught in the middle of the federal fight over food assistance, Claribel Sanabria sat in her car outside WHEAT food pantry in West Haven Tuesday afternoon.

She had just walked out with a few bags of groceries she hand-packed inside the Washington Avenue facility – food she said she needed to supplement the \$276 a month she gets in SNAP benefits. As of last week, she wasn’t sure that money would arrive.

“It’s like a dream what we’re going through,” Sanabria said. “We don’t even believe it.”

Across Connecticut, it’s been a chaotic few weeks for residents who receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – and for the people who serve them at food pantries and other organizations.

As the federal government

Inside: SNAP benefits to resume for millions nationwide after record shutdown, but questions remain. Page A15

shutdown approached its second month, President Donald Trump initially said SNAP benefits would not be funded in November, causing panic for millions of Americans who rely on the program. A judge ordered the government to release the money – seemingly good news for SNAP recipients – but the Trump administration protested, appealing the case to the Supreme Court.

In the last few days, the situation has become somewhat clearer. Gov. Ned Lamont announced the state would replace any SNAP benefits the federal government cut, and most Connecticut recipients saw the money arrive in their accounts over the weekend. With the shutdown apparently set to end, December benefits should be safe as well, though with new limita-

tions imposed earlier this year in a federal spending bill.

Naturally, all that confusion and concern of the past few weeks has left an impression. At multiple food pantries this week, officials said demand remains higher than usual, whether because residents are still feeling effects of the shutdown or because they’re nervous about what could happen next.

In Stamford, one pantry reports a 50% increase in visitors. In Groton, a woman seeking help from a local non-profit says she has barely been able to feed herself due to the shutdown. In New Britain, dozens of people shivered outside a housing project on a recent morning waiting for groceries.

On the bright side, officials at food pantries say, donations have also surged, whether from individuals, businesses or municipalities.

“We don’t have a front desk, but we have stationed someone full-time to be at the

front desk because so many people are walking in with either checks or bringing food,” said Annie Stockton, vice president of the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut’s food center.

These are scenes from four pantries across Connecticut, a wealthy state where thousands of people are nonetheless struggling to scrape by.

Stamford, Monday morning

Most of those seeking food at Stamford’s Yerwood Center made appointments in advance. It’s how Person to Person, the Darien-based food bank that distributes food at the center, makes sure there’s enough food for everyone and that families get balanced meals and not just whatever’s available.

But Nancy Coughlin, who runs Person to Person, says they make allowances for walk-ins.

“We don’t turn anyone away,” she said.

Food continues on A4

A deep dive into the Democrats’ rout of local Republicans in CT cities



Dan Haar

COMMENTARY

Heading into last week’s municipal elections, Ellington First Selectman Lori Spielman seemed well positioned to hold her grip on town hall.

The Republican had won five straight terms, all by a comfortable margin or with no opponent at all. That made sense. The smallish, mostly rural eastern Connecticut town has a far larger number of registered GOP voters than registered Democrats – a gap that widened over the last four years.

Haar continues on A8



Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

A man crosses a flooded street in Bridgeport during heavy rains in 2019.

More than \$900K in climate change grants awarded

Funding will help Sound neighbors prepare for environmental risks

By Austin Mirmina

STAFF WRITER

More than a dozen coastal organizations along Long Island Sound, including five in Connecticut, have received about \$909,000 to help their communities better handle the effects of climate change.

The funding, provided through Climate continues on A4

West Haven tenants say rent increases meant to push them out

Landlord argues otherwise

By Brian Zahn

STAFF WRITER

WEST HAVEN — For five months, tenants of the three-story, 63-unit Crestview Apartments have been without a functioning elevator. They say they’ve dealt with mice scurrying throughout their units without being taken seriously. Yet their landlord is looking to raise their monthly rent by over 20%.

Tenant Eldren Smith, 69, was successful before West Haven’s Fair Rent Commission in August in appealing an increase to his monthly rent from \$1,135 to \$1,395. The commission ruled that his rent should remain at \$1,135, that any \$15 money order fees associated with paying his rent be waived and that he receive a \$105 retroactive credit dating back to



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Resident Eldren Smith outside Crestview Apartments in West Haven.

February.

Smith, who has lived in his unit for almost a decade, said he felt motivated to fight so that he and other longtime tenants in the building, many of whom are seniors receiving fixed income, can re-

Rent continues on A8

A first look at renovation of historic New Haven restaurant

By Susan Braden

STAFF WRITER

NEW HAVEN — When Mayor Justin Elicker first came into the Union League as a young man, he made the faux pas of forgetting to wear a jacket to the acclaimed French restaurant.

Quickly, staff gave Elicker a too-large jacket for his slender frame and ushered him to a seat in the corner.

This was met with laughter from the group at the recent unveiling of a \$4 million-plus renovation to the historic Roger Sherman House, a national landmark that was the for-



Ned Gerard/ Hearst Connecticut Media

mer home of New Haven’s first mayor, Roger Sherman, who hosted George Washington in 1789 for tea by the fireplace, now a focal point in the dining room.

Yale University took ownership and the build-

Alexander Clark, owner of Union League Hospitality, at the bar and cocktail lounge at the newly renovated Union League restaurant in New Haven.

ing has had a restaurant there for years. Alexander Clark, a tech entrepreneur turned restaurateur, bought former Union League Café at 1032 Chapel St. in 2023 from Yale University for more than \$4.3

Café continues on A9

