



## **Local Groups Provide More Than 500 Thanksgiving Dinners**

Erie, Pa. -- November 23, 1999 -- Thirteen is far from an unlucky number for organizers of an area Thanksgiving dinner drive. For the 13th consecutive year, a group of local organizations is helping make Thanksgiving happier for needy families throughout the ERIE area.

Individuals from Erie Insurance Group, Catholic Charities, St. Mark Church in Lawrence Park, General Electric Transportation Systems, Harborcreek Youth Services, Knox Law Firm and Vendetti and Vendetti Law Firm are involved in an effort that is expected to result in the distribution of more than 500 complete Thanksgiving dinners to Erie area families.

The program is headed by Rick and Jane Hinman, who organize the effort on behalf of all the groups involved. Rick, a vice president at Erie Insurance Group, notes that this idea began when he and his wife donated a dinner to Catholic Charities ten years ago. "We started telling others about it and by the third year we had 25 dinners donated," he said. Last year the organizations were responsible for the delivery of more than 739 dinners. Including the dinners to be delivered in 1999, the effort will have touched the lives of nearly 4,000 families in its 13 year history.

Preparation for the meal collection begins in September when the Hinmans contact Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Erie. Catholic Charities contacts local social service agencies to determine the number of dinners each needs. The organizations benefitting from the donations coordinate their individual pick up and delivery of meals to their respective families.

The dinners come from individuals, families and employee groups who purchase all of the food items or donate money. "Tops Market in Erie is a tremendous help, too," said Rick. "Many generous people give us money to purchase dinners. For \$27.50 each, Tops gathers all the supplies needed for a full Thanksgiving dinner and boxes it up for easy delivery."

The Erie Insurance "horseshoe" entrance on East Fifth Street between French and Holland becomes a staging area for meal collections. Volunteers will be working this Tuesday, November 23, 1999, from 7- 8:30 a.m. coordinating the dinner distribution. More than half of the 750 dinner donations this year have been contributed by Erie Insurance employees and agents.

Hinman notes that without the involvement of Catholic Charities a program this size could not be possible. "They provide a key link between those who contribute the dinners and the needy families who receive them," he said.