

Tuesday, September 02, 2008 — Time: 7:56:16 AM EST

Event raises awareness and funds for the Cape Coral Caring Center; Restaurant offers samples off menu

By MCKENZIE CASSIDY, mcassidy@breezenewspapers.com

The Cape Coral Community Foundation partnered up with Bonefish Grill on Saturday night to raise money for the Cape Coral Caring Center's food pantry. With the economy in shambles and local agencies reporting a surge in the need of donated food, the drive is needed now more than ever, organizers explained.

Bonefish Grill, which plans to open on Pine Island Road this week, opened its doors early so that the community could sample food on the restaurant's menu. Patrons paid \$25 per person to taste each of the dishes served family style.

Sean O'Keefe, the managing partner of the new restaurant, said that before a new Bonefish Grill opens the managers try to work with a local charity that benefits the community.



"The partner goes out and picks a charity," said O'Keefe. "I wanted something that is local and gives back to Cape Coral. It was a really great fit."

When the event began at 6 p.m. the community foundation had sold 150 tickets which amounted to approximately \$3,700, said Beth Sanger, executive director. Of course, there were other raffles and giveaways on Saturday night that raised even more money for the food pantry.

Raffles included a three-night stay at Cape Harbour and a two-night stay at the Hampton Inn, and the restaurant auctioned off dinner for 10 including wine at the Bonefish Grill.

Sanger said the restaurant paid for all of the invitations and donated all of the food for the Saturday fundraising event.

"They are so excited to do this. It's a great kickoff. It was imperative when they partnered with us that all of the money goes to putting food back in the pantry," she said. "This shows our commitment and that we do other things in the community."

The Cape Coral Community Foundation is known locally for doling out grants, Sanger said, but the foundation wants the community to know that it participates in other philanthropic enterprises such as the school supply drive held last month where the goal of 130 backpacks full of supplies for homeless children was exceeded.

Chairman of the foundation's board, Bob Knight, said there was a "fantastic turnout for this soft opening."

"It's a great vehicle for philanthropic causes," he said. "It's like the piggy bank of the community. It continues to grow."

In 2007 the Cape Coral Caring Center reported serving a total of 54 tons of food to 7,909 individuals including 2,636 families.

"It was such a neat opportunity to partner with Bonefish," said Sanger. "It's all about basic human need."