

## **Mayor, fire chief go head-to-head in pantry benefit**

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Dressed in his full gear, Assistant Fire Chief Richard Mikel bent down to touch his toes a few times so he could stretch before the sprint he was about to take.

It was just after 8 a.m. inside Jewel-Osco, 127 E. Ogden Ave., and he was about to compete against Mayor George Pradel in a shopping spree through the grocery store's frozen food section. In a match-up between Naperville's Police and Fire departments, a representative from each had two and a half minutes to fill their carts with up to \$500 in food for local charities.

Asked if he had a strategy, Mikel joked: "I'm going to trip him. If I can't go fast, I'll go foul."

Pradel, who wore his former police uniform, was competing for Loaves and Fishes food pantry. He began by tossing containers of Italian beef and pizzas into a cart, then making his way through the freezer aisles. Frozen foods continued to fly from the freezer into various waiting shopping carts, as Mikel began by selecting large boxes of lasagna and other family-sized food packages. Then he too made his way through the rest of the freezer section.

"I can't believe how fast two and a half minutes went," said Mikel, who competed for Public Action to Deliver Shelter.

DuPage PADS has experienced a 34 percent increase in the number of users compared to 2007, Executive Director Carol Simler said. Of that amount, 87 percent are families. "With our volunteers and congregations, we're able to serve those so they are not out on the street," Simler said.

The agency provides lunch for its clients every day, she said. And the food will also be distributed to those living in apartments run by DuPage PADS. "This food will help to support those living on little or no income," Simler said.

It was the first year the Fire Department participated in the shopping spree; Pradel participated in a three-minute spree last year. Similar to 2008, the event was sponsored by Jewel, which donated all of the food, and conducted by the Midwest Frozen and Refrigerated Food Association. The event served as a kick-off of National Frozen Food Month in March.

"Everybody got involved in this," Pradel said. "It's a win-win situation. People, starting tomorrow, are going to be reaping the benefits of what we just did."

Pradel, who just had surgery last week for a hernia, was under doctor's orders not to lift more than 15 pounds. "I felt myself holding back," Pradel said afterwards. "I had to be careful not to overdue it."

Still, his carts were filled with plenty of frozen dinners, meats and treats. The mayor selected many kid-friendly items, said Charles McLimans, executive director of Loaves and Fishes. The items — Hot Pockets, corn dogs, pizza and others — are ones the food pantry normally can't buy, he said.

"Those will be a real treat for our kids," McLimans said. "He has a real soft heart for them." McLimans said the shopping spree helps raise awareness for "two very worthwhile charities."

By the time the cash register rang up the final items, Mikel had collected \$945.91 worth of food, and Pradel gathered \$605.17 worth. Even though they both went over the \$500 limit, the two organizations received all of the food. And since they broke the \$500 mark, each charity also was given a \$265 cash bonus.

"This is the best we ever had," said Skip Friz, president of the Midwest Frozen and Refrigerated Food Association. "We are exceedingly pleased."