BY DANIEL BEEKMAN
DAILY NEWS WRITER

KIRK FOLLINI used to make $75 an hour as a computer consultant on Wall Street — before the economy dipped.

“I went from that to collecting welfare,” said Follini, 50, who now uses the Part of the Solution (POTS) food pantry in Bedford Park.

Visits to Bronx emergency food programs jumped 22% last year from 2008, says City Harvest, a food bank that distributes to pantries across the city.

To help meet the rising demand, POTS broke ground this week on an $8.1 million social service center next door to the cramped Webster Ave. headquarters it has occupied for 24 years.

The new, bigger and better POTS food pantry and soup kitchen is expected to open by Thanksgiving and serve 50,000 more meals annually.

“We’ll do the same for more people, and more for people,” said POTS executive director Sister Mary Alice Haman, who called the new space a “dream come true.”

The new 15,000-square-foot center will also allow the nonprofit to broaden its services.

Hot food, a shower, legal advice, homework help and groceries will be available for patrons at the new digs.

“The new space should be wonderful,” said Pansy Eaves, a Bedford Park senior who uses the pantry. “People won’t have to stand in line so much.”

The new building is triple the size of the current ramshackle house, which can accommodate only 20 diners. Patrons will also enjoy more privacy during one-on-one engagements with caseworkers at the center, said development director Maureen Sheehan.

The food pantry served 330,000 meals last year, up from 200,000 in 2005, officials said.

POTS was able to use a private Low Income Investment Fund loan to purchase the building next door, a former beauty supply shop. They raised $5 million in private funds, and in March received additional cash in tax credits.

The building was gutted and renovations have begun. The new headquarters will include offices for POTS lawyers and caseworkers, who won $1 million in public benefits and prevented 90 evictions last year, the group said.

The new dining room will be able to seat 64 people for more leisurely meals and will host homework help and nutrition classes, said Sheehan.

The new headquarters will also boast a free barbershop and a “supermarket style” pantry. Instead of one shower stall, the new POTS will have three.

The Webster Ave. food pantry POTS, Part of the Solution, will expand from cramped space to location next door. Photo by Enid Alvarez/Daily News