That's enough meals to feed 1,427 kids for a year

By Russ Pankonin

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Worldwide, 400 million children go hungry each day; 18,000 of those children will die each day from hunger, according to Feed My Starving Children.

Last week, nearly 1,500 people from 51 different communities in Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa and Indiana gathered in Imperial to make a difference in those statistics.

During a MobilePack event for Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) held in Imperial July 24-28, volunteers packaged 520,992 meals to feed starving children. That's enough meals to feed 1,427 kids for a year.

This marks the second consecutive year Southwest Nebraska Meals for God's Children has sponsored the event, which was held in the multi-purpose room at Crossroads Wesleyan Church.

Last year, the event packaged 227,664 meals. The goal this year was to double that figure and they did, according to committee member Dick Banks of Imperial.

Banks is joined on the committee by Paul and Rhonda Hickman and James Marlatt.

“We made a difference,” Banks said this week after the completion of another successful event.

To make the event happen, the group needed to raise $110,000 to cover the cost of the food for the MobilePack event.

Banks said they will exceed that amount.

The effort got a big boost from a $30,000 matching match made by an anonymous donor. Banks said they hit the match by the July 1 deadline.

Banks said two semi trucks filled with boxes of food packaged in Imperial are already en route to port cities for shipment overseas.

According to FMSC, food packed in Imperial will be sent to Honduras, Nicauragua and the Dominican Republic.

One truck from Convoy of Hope picked up one load and a private carrier picked up another load. Convoy of Hope assists with the transportation of food around the country and the world.

Work ethic evident

FMSC employees running the event said the average for a two-hour packing session is about one box of food per person. In Imperial, volunteers set an average of 1.8 boxes per person.

Banks said that comes from the work ethic this region is especially known for.

Banks said the turnout of volunteers was incredible. The numbers were lower during the day Tuesday and Wednesday but by Wednesday night, all seven packing stations were full.

In the last two-hour session Wednesday night, they had 141 volunteers who packed more than 61,000 meals.

Banks said they tried a new twist Friday night, with a “midnight madness” packing from 9-midnight.

This brought out a number of youth groups, Banks said. In fact, he said they had to shut down early Friday night to have enough food to pack for the sessions scheduled Saturday.

Banks said the Mennonite community in the area turned out especially strong. When numbers were low Thursday afternoon, participants from earlier sessions made some calls, he said, and they had volunteers the rest of the way, from youth to entire families.

Banks said a group of 25 from Estes Park, Colo., came down and packed on two different days, staying in Imperial overnight on two nights.

A Sidney church brought a bus full of 44 people to pack for two shifts. Groups of 20 or more came from Ovid, Colo., and Atwood, Kan., Banks added.

Plans underway for next year

Banks said the committee is already starting to plan for next year's event, with a similar goal of 500,000 meals.

Last year's MobilePack event in Imperial was the first ever in Nebraska for FMSC.

What's even more inspiring, Banks said, is that since last year's event, there have been MobilePack events in McCook, Oxford and North Platte with events planned in Holdrege and Kearney. "And it all started here in Chase County," Banks said.

"Obviously, God has his fingerprints on this," Banks said.

He said it's great to see people all working together for one purpose. It helps break down barriers, he said, because, "We are all part of God's kingdom."