Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska volunteers and board members met last week to discuss the progress of house renovations. Those pictured include (from left) Pastor Keith Wellman, Cindy Einspahr, Kent Haarberg, Hazel Haarberg, Elaine Haarberg, Jan Coone, Mary Haarberg, Laurie Kerchal, Pastor Greg Stuckwisch and Annette Long.

By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

There's a new nonprofit organization in Wauneta, its mission is to provide nourishing food to hungry children throughout the world.

Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska allows volunteers to package nourishing food that will be delivered by the Orphan Grain Train to children in need throughout the world.

The southwest Nebraska chapter of Mercy Meals is based in Wauneta. Volunteers are busy remodeling the house just north of Sinner's Paint and Body Shop. The house will become the

organization's base of operation in southwest Nebraska.

The efforts to get Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska up and going have been a community effort. Volunteers have completed all of the work to the house so far.

Because the initial use of the house was donated, the organization had very low startup fees. They have hopes to purchase the house in the future.

So far, the organization has received $4,500 in cash donations in addition to many donations of building supplies, materials and many hours of labor to get the operation going.

Organization leaders have already purchased enough food to make 12,000 meals. The food packaged is highly nutritious and carries a cost of only $0.10 per serving–which includes food and packaging materials.

"We can feed 100,000 people for only $10,000," said Pastor Greg Stuckwisch, one of the Mercy Meals volunteers. A donation of $10 would purchase the food and supplies needed to provide 100 meals.

Once Southwest Nebraska volunteers package the food, it will be shipped free of charge by the Orphan Grain Train to those in need.

The food is shipped both internationally to places such as Haiti, India, the former Soviet Union, but it is also shipped domestically to places including an Indian reservation in New Mexico.

Local leadership

Board members for Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska include Jan Coone, Laurie Kerchal, Harold and Jan Nordhausen, Kent and Elaine Haarberg, Mary Haarberg, Rick and Cindy Einspahr, Janet Keiser, Annette Long, Pastor Stuckwisch, and Pastor Keith Wellman.

Organizational volunteers include Kevin Kerchal, Jim Haarberg, Bill and Kim Wilson, Rich Keiser, Jim Long, Janet Stuckwisch, Annie and Chris Pursley.

Volunteers and donations needed

The organization still needs volunteers. Those interested in helping with the renovations to the house should call Laurie Kerchal, the project manager at 308-394-5180.

The total anticipated start up expenses for the organization is $20,000 which includes purchase of the facility, food and utilities.

Once the organization is up and going leaders anticipate the yearly operating expenses for the facility to be approximately $3,000. The remainder of any donations received will be spent on the purchase of food.

“A donation of $7.50 per month would feed someone for an entire year,” explained Long.

Those who would like to make a financial donation may do so by contacting Mary Haarberg, treasurer at 308-882-5642, Long at 308-394-5252 or Pastor Stuckwisch at 308-394-5206.

Once the house renovations are complete volunteers will be needed to help assemble meals. Meal assembly requires a group of eight to 10 volunteers.

Volunteering at Mercy Meals will be a family-friendly affair. Young children are welcome to join their parents and older siblings. Young children can either play at the house or color the shipping boxes that will be sent to people in need throughout the world.

Those interested in volunteering to package food should contact a Mercy Meals board member.

The group will host an open house during Wauneta's Harvest Festival next weekend on Saturday, July 28 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

About Mercy Meals

Mercy Meals was originally started by Edie Noffke, a night nurse at the hospital in Norfolk, Neb. who wanted to do something for the worldwide community in her spare time.

The food packaged by Mercy Meals volunteers has been delivered to orphanages, refugee camps, feeding centers, disaster relief centers and local food pantries. Their hope is to instill a sense of self-empowerment, civic duty, world awareness, kindness toward fellow men and women and an appreciation for the blessings in their daily lives in children worldwide.

Series on local service organizations and clubs

This story is part of an ongoing series highlighting service organizations and community clubs in the Wauneta area. The purpose of the series is to inform the public of what local organizations are doing for the community and how they can help.

At the end of the series, Breeze readers will be asked to vote for their favorite organization or club. The organization or club receiving the most votes will be given a $50 donation to use towards the project of its choice.

Organizations and community clubs interested in being featured in the series should contact the Breeze at 308-394-5389 or waunetabreeze@bwtelcom.net.