

Corporate O.C. Practices Purposeful Giving

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GARDEN GROVE -- Box after box whizzed down an assembly line, stuffed to the brim with canned food, sealed with tape and hauled onto a forklift – one after the other, all day long.

Filled by nearly 1,000 pairs of hands from employees and their families from local corporations, the packed boxes sat at the Community Action Partnership of Orange County's food bank before they met those in need throughout the county.

Saturday's National Family Volunteer Day provided corporate companies and their associates the ability to give back to the community for the holiday season.

"It has turned out to be quite a massive feel-good event right before the holidays that also provides a tangible and meaningful benefit for the community as well," Orange County Food Bank Director Mark Lowry said.

Local participation in the national event came to life a few years ago when Disneyland Resort asked the nonprofit what it would take to stock the food bank with enough food boxes for the entire holiday season, Lowry said. After some brainstorming, the annual event of assembling food boxes for needy O.C. families came about.

With the economy taking a hit, Lowry said that need has doubled this year – March 2008 year-to-date showed approximately 233,000 served and March 2009 year-to-date reflected more than 466,000 served.

"Truth is, corporate America has taken a big black eye the last year," Lowry said. "Most of what we've heard about has been over the top bonuses, elaborate retreats. What a great example (this is) of corporate responsibility."

Nicole Trombly, who lent a hand Saturday for her company, Ingram Micro, said her corporation is being encouraged to contribute to nonprofit organizations as teams in place of holding holiday parties.

Corporations participating in charitable events together can also be a crucial team-building experience, she said.

"You learn more about (your employees), and you see a different side of them than what you see at work," she said.

Disneyland Resort Ambassador Quinn Shurian said that more than 200 employees from Disneyland came to participate Saturday after his division helped the food bank out a few weeks ago.

"We came here as a team-building event and we packed over 2,100 boxes in just about three and a half hours," Shurian said. "You think about all the blessings that we have: we're employed, we've got places to live, we've got plenty of food and then you remember that there are so many people in Orange County and across America that don't have those options."

Corporate collaboration in charitable events not only strengthens the team, Lowry said, it boosts morale and shows that the employer cares about the greater community.

People are finding other ways to engage in purposeful giving this season, Lowry said.

A couple who recently got married asked guests to bring canned food for the food bank in place of traditional wedding gifts and others asked friends to give donations instead of birthday presents, Lowry said.

"More people than we have ever seen before are thinking of alternative ways to be involved in community service," he said.

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