



LAMP Ministries provides food to needy residents

Veterans will also be fed through donations made by Americans Helping Americans

By Patrick Stokerpstoker@gainesvilletimes.com

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More than 200 people had something to be thankful for Saturday when they received a free meal from a local ministry.

The Latin American Ministries Program passed out meals to the needy in the parking lot of La Flor de Jalisco No. 2 on Atlanta Highway.

This year's Feed the Hungry charity event was a much different scene from the last two years when the ministry had to cancel due to lack of donations.

But this year, donations poured in, and by noon, volunteers had fed nearly 250 people.

"We had a lot of community help," said Mary Mauricio, executive director for LAMP Ministries.

While unemployment has declined in recent months and the job outlook is improving, many remain jobless, especially in the predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods around Atlanta Highway.

And while Thanksgiving is not celebrated in the Latin American countries where many of the beneficiaries came, the free food was an opportunity to receive a full meal.

Volunteers planned to pass out meals from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., but as soon as they put out signs at about 9:30 a.m., people began lining up for an early Thanksgiving meal.

"People were here early, but that's good. They just swarmed in here," Mauricio said.

"People came and were served and there were very few that got turned away."

Among those the ministry fed was a mother and her seven children whose father died last month. The family can't even afford to heat their home, Mauricio said.

"This gives us a chance to see who's in need of what. People are suffering because of the economy and have no jobs," Mauricio said.

Volunteers braved the cold and came out in force to prepare and hand out meals.

"We enjoy doing this and giving back to the community and allow the people to be a part of the community," Mauricio said.

The Rev. Larry Burnett traveled from Memphis, Tenn., to help feed the hungry. The pastor of Hometown Pent Holiness Church in Memphis said he wanted to volunteer for the cause because of the need in Gainesville.

"We support them and their ministry and we wanted to come down and really see what they do," Burnett said. "There's a real need in this area with as many people that came back and certainly as quick as they came by."

Burnett hopes in future years more donations can be made to allow for additional locations to hand out food.

Among the volunteers was a group of juveniles completing required community service. Arlene Brock from the Department of Juvenile Justice in Hall County brought five youths to help and perhaps learn a valuable lesson that will keep them from future troubles, she said.

Forsyth County's Department of Juvenile Justice also brought a group of volunteers.

"I brought some kids that I work with to help out in the community a little bit," Brock said. "A lot of them are appreciative of what they have at home now, not just through this, but we do other things in the community with them as well."

The ministry will also be giving out meals to military veterans Thursday through donations made by Americans Helping Americans.