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Local News

Work camp youth bring food donations

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MOUNT PLEASANT — A 20-foot long row of canned goods stacked as high as six cans tall spanned the center of the gym floor at Case High School.

The canned goods, totaling about 1,900, came to Racine with 384 work camp participants, who descended on the city this week to fix up 63 homes.

The participants, mostly high school-aged youth, are part of a Group Work Camp hosted by the Racine Neighborhood Watch and their canned goods will go to the Racine County Food Bank. Group Work Camps have been in Racine for the last 11 years but this is the first time participants have donated food.

Racine's work camp is part of Group Work Camps, a Colorado-based nonprofit Christian service organization that organizes youth groups for week-long home repair projects like roofing, painting, drywalling and fixing or constructing porches or wheelchair ramps. The projects are at homes with elderly, low-income or otherwise disadvantaged residents.

The participants eat, sleep and organize themselves at Case High School, 7345 Washington Ave. That's where the cans have been collected and displayed at daily evening programs and worship services. The cans wrapped around speakers, a drum set and a projector screen.

Friday evening the participants will load the food into a Racine County Food Bank truck for distribution to food pantries across the county, said Erica Nartker, Racine's Group Work Camp director.

Aside from the canned goods, participants also donated \$400, she said.

Katie Peterson, 15, from Grand Rapids, Mich., attended last year and this year. Katie, who is painting a garage and wheelchair ramp this week, said the canned food donation was a good addition to the program.

"We didn't do something like this last year," she explained, "but it just kinda feels good."

Racine County Food Bank Executive Director Dan Taivalkoski said he was excited by the canned goods because food donations have been down a bit this year.

Work camp participants were sent the Racine County Food Bank's list of most needed items, which includes peanut butter, canned fish, canned meat, meat items, fruit and beef stew, Taivalkoski said.

"They're higher protein and more expensive items," Taivalkoski said. "From the looks of things, (campers) took that to heart."

On average this year, the Racine County Food Bank has distributed 62,000 cans per month and served about 2,000 families on a monthly basis, Taivalkoski said.

"The need is much greater than this one drive," he said, "but all these people helping us in this way adds up to help us meet the continued demand."

HOW TO GIVE

Donations for the Racine County Food Bank can be dropped off at 2000 DeKoven Ave., Unit 2, Racine from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday or by appointment. It is best to call ahead at (262) 632-2307. In addition, the Food Bank also maintains a collection barrels at all of the Pick 'n Save and Piggly Wiggly locations east of I-94.

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