

From Waunakee to Haiti: Food for Kidz meals delivered to orphanage, school

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A group of Waunakee volunteers have made connections with students at a school and orphanage in Haiti, bringing food packaged by more than 1,000 Waunakee volunteers to hungry children there.

In January, five Waunakee volunteers traveled to Haiti for a week to help at Feed My Lambs Orphanage and School. Rhonda Reis, Will Reis, Nancy Laubmeier, John Gaska and Mick Holm were joined by other volunteers from around the country to work on various projects at the school.

It was the second trip for Holm, Laubmeier and Gaska.

It all started in October at Waunakee High School when more than 1,600 volunteers helped package 400,000 meals at the 13th annual Food for Kidz event. More than 100,000 of the meals stayed in Dane County. Some went back to Food for Kidz for distribution around the world, and the rest were loaded into a shipping container bound for Haiti. Two different meals were shipped: a rice-and-bean based meal and a nutritious cinnamon instant oatmeal.

"It was a wonderful experience trying to make a small difference in the lives of those who have so little," Holm said.

The group helped prepare and serve the food to the more than 600 students who attend the school. Because of the cost, the kids are served a meal at the school only three times a week.



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Mick Holm, Rhonda Reis and Nancy Laubmeier prepare meals for the children at Feed My Lambs Orphanage and School in Haiti.

Holm said they saw many students packing up some of the lunch, so the rest of their family would have something to eat that night.

Because of the extreme poverty in the area, hungry families come to Feed My Lambs looking for food. They are given packets that come from Waunakee. "It is pretty amazing that the food we produced in the high school gym could help so many hungry people in Haiti," Holm said.

Waunakee will again package meals on Oct. 20 at the high school. The hope is to package 500,000 meals in one day, and some will again be loaded into a shipping container bound for Haiti.

Laubmeier said she was pleased to see the progress made at the school since the group's trip a year prior, but the needs remain acute, especially for those in rural areas.

The connections between Waunakee and Haiti have continued

to grow, she said. Many women from Waunakee contributed to the fabric which was purchased in Haiti for school uniforms. Forty-five blouses were later sewn by volunteers in Waunakee.

Laubmeier took 32 kits sewed and assembled by Days for Girls' Middleton Chapter volunteers to Haiti. The kits provide washable, reusable sanitary products to girls so they are able to attend school during the days of their menstruation.

Will Reis said he was able spend time with the children and still thinks of them often.

Gaska remembered several children bringing meals home for their families.

"Two fingers meant that plate would be shared by students; four fingers meant four would have lunch, as not every student had a plate. As I scooped rice and beans, Rhonda (Reis) would drizzle a bit of spicy juice on top, and it would go to a child that

would not otherwise eat," he said.

The group also loaded up 50 boxes of food packages into the back of a donated pickup and carried all they could up a rocky trail with kids and hungry families behind them. They stopped at shacks with electricity, lights, water or toilets and delivered food to the families.

"I am so proud of the work our committee has done with the community to serve the most impoverished of our neighbors," Will Reis said.

Rhonda Reis said the trip has forever changed how she sees the world.

"The children in the orphanage really made a strong impact on me. They have so little and yet they are so full of joy and gratitude," she said. "We went there to help those in need, but in return learned valuable lessons of living a life of love, faith and gratitude through interacting with those served."