

## Goal exceeded by 27,200 meals at Mercy Meal's Feed the Philippines packing event

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 26 February 2014 22:07 - Last Updated Wednesday, 26 February 2014 22:11

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**The Orphan Grain Train truck stopped by the Mercy house in Wauneta Monday morning and loaded an additional 43,200 meals packaged in Wauneta to the 187,200 packaged in Imperial over the weekend at the Feed the Philippines mega packing event. From left, Mercy Meals board member Kent Haarberg and Orphan Grain Train truck driver Jim Kirsch watch as volunteer Jim Long puts the final two pallets onto the Orphan Grain Train truck. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)**

*187,200 meals packaged*

*by over 400 volunteers*

**By Sheri Hink-Wagner**

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### The Wauneta Breeze

The Zion Lutheran Church in Imperial was a flurry of activity over the weekend when over 400 volunteers gathered to package meals for starving people in the Philippines.

Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska hosted the mega packing event, a collaborative project with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Orphan Grain train, with a goal of packaging 160,000 meals. At the end of the weekend they surpassed their goal by packaging a total of 187,200 meals.

"It was awesome! The event was very well organized and ran smoothly. The volunteers were very willing to help wherever needed, were excited and had a good time helping with this mission project. Some of them said it was nice to get to do 'hands on,'" said Mercy Meals board member Mary Haarberg of Imperial.

"We had people of all ages. The kids were very inquisitive and eager to find out where the meals were going and asked many questions about the ingredients and the kids from the Philippines who were receiving it. It gave the kids a sense of pride and accomplishment."

The meals—which consist of rice, soy, dehydrated vegetables, chicken flavored vitamin and mineral powder—are designed to be gentle on the digestive system of individuals who may be malnourished or starving.

The meals packaged at the event are being sent directly to the Philippines for starving children and families impacted by the typhoon that hit the Philippines on Nov. 8, 2013. According to the LCMS website, "The storm displaced 4 million people, killed nearly 6,000 and destroyed everything in its path. Emergency food provisions and rebuilding homes and churches on the island of Leyte are part of the ongoing relief efforts by the LCMS and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines."

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Volunteers traveled to Imperial from as far north as Ogallala, as far west as Sterling, Colo., as far east as McCook and as far south as Bird City, Kan. In fact, once they were there several volunteers stayed past their designated shift and worked another.

Volunteers were also accommodating after the snow storm that hit Saturday afternoon and evening. Some rescheduled their shift to the Mercy Meals house in Wauneta on a later date and others who were able to make it to the church on Sunday stayed to help cover the second shift for others who were unable to make it in.

"It was nice to see people from these smaller communities coming together to do this huge mission project. We sincerely appreciate all of the volunteers from making cookies, unloading containers of supplies, labeling Mercy Meals bags, putting together boxes and all of the behind scene help that we received. The many volunteers that stayed extra due to the weather was also appreciated," expressed Haarberg.

Orphan Grain Train sent a truck to the Zion Lutheran Church on Friday, Feb. 21. The truck and driver, Jim Kirsch of Norfolk, stayed in town throughout the event. Kirsch works part time as a truck driver for OGT and said he was happy to have helped at the event. Mercy Meals board members said he stayed on site and helped with each and every one of the 10 shifts during the mega packing event.

Before leaving southwest Nebraska Kirsch brought the OGT truck to the Mercy House in Wauneta Monday morning to pick up four additional pallets of meals packaged for those in the Philippines. The truck headed back to Norfolk 100 percent full with a total of 230,400 meals.

Orphan Grain Train representatives told Haarberg the meals packed at the event will be placed into a container bound for the Philippines by mid-March.

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### **Other Feed the Philippines events**

Feed the Philippines has a goal of packaging one million meals total. In addition to the Imperial event, "Feed the Philippines" events are being facilitated in Sioux City, Iowa, Lincoln, Hastings, Norfolk, Odell (the new home of Redeemer Lutheran's former pastor Greg Stuckwisch) and Wauneta. The target completion date for packaging all one million meals is April 30, 2014.

The events were made possible by a grant from LCMS to purchase the raw food supplies needed for the packing event. Transportation and distribution of the packaged meals is provided by Orphan Grain Train at no charge.

### **Still many ways to help**

Although Feed the Philippines was a special event for Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska, they continue to need help and volunteers throughout the year. The group is run 100 percent by volunteers. Those who want to contribute can package meals during the regularly scheduled packing events on the second Monday of each month from 6 p.m. MT/7 p.m. CT to 8 p.m. MT/9 p.m. CT and the third Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. MT/10 a.m. CT to 11 a.m. MT/12 p.m. CT at the Mercy Meals House in Wauneta.

The organization will also accommodate groups who wish to package at other times. "If there are groups that want to come and pack we schedule those at any time convenient for the group," said Haarberg.

Those who are unable to come and package meals but wish to contribute can help by donating money to help purchase the ingredients needed for the meals. Donations can be sent to Mercy Meals of SW Ne., PO Box 474, Wauneta, Ne 69045.

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For more information about the organization, upcoming packing events, volunteer sign up forms and board member contact information visit their website at [mercymealsofsouthwestnebraska.org](http://mercymealsofsouthwestnebraska.org).



**Over 400 volunteers rolled up their sleeves and packaged meals for starving children and families at Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska's Feed the Philippines mega packing event in Imperial last weekend. A total of 187,200 meals were packaged during the three-day event. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)**