

LOCALNEWS

Mayfield: ‘Salvation Army will be here until the end’

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

After thousands of meals served and thousands of working hours logged, The Salvation Army is still going strong in assisting flood relief efforts.

According to Beverly Mayfield, envoy of the local Salvation Army, volunteers, employees and officers have had a busy few weeks keeping up with flooding along area lakes and rivers.

“We’ve had a canteen to provide meals, snacks and beverages to volunteers as well as people in need in affected areas,” Mayfield said. “We’ve been busy.”

Busy indeed.

In just more than two weeks, 7,478 meals, snacks and beverages have been served, and 1,460 hours have been logged by Salvation Army officers, employees and volunteers.

Sandbagging has slowed down and so has The Salvation Army’s presence at Kerry Park or “sandbag central,” as Mayfield called it, but she said should efforts start back up again – crews will be ready.

“We’re not going anywhere,” she explained. “We will stay involved until the end, whenever that might be. We will be wherever the need is, even during the cleanup when that time comes.”

Providing fuel

The Salvation Army’s presence throughout relief efforts, Mayfield said, has been appreciated by many – sandbagging volunteers and affected property owners.

“When people are working very hard, they often overlook their own health to help others,” she said, noting the importance of the relationship with the Red Cross, which delivers meals to people in need. “Everyone has been very thankful of the help we’ve been providing.”

The organization’s assistance goes beyond providing full bellies. Mayfield said spiritual help is available, too.

“We offer a variety of services we are able to help people with,” she said.

One big family

Mayfield said she has witnessed a community coming together over the past couple weeks, but she isn’t surprised.

“We’ve always known when there’s a need people just gather together,” she said. “They’re there to help others – their neighbors. It’s like one big family.”

All ages have come together during a time of crisis and the generosity, is heartwarming, Mayfield said.

“There are so many peo-



FILE PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Sen. Al Franken meets with and thanks local Salvation Army staff and volunteers June 21 at Kerry Park.

ple involved,” she said. “And local businesses — I can’t say enough about the business owners and employees that have provided beverages, meals and volunteer hours to serve wherever the need is.”

Until the end

As flooding along Rainy Lake drags on, officials are finding it almost impossible to predict when recovery efforts will be in full swing. However, when that time comes, Mayfield said The Salvation Army will be ready.

“We’re not sure how it’ll play out, but we will be here and we will be ready to help,” she said, noting clean-up kits will be available. “We have a great community of people who watch out for each other and are ready to do what it takes to help their neighbor. We’ll all be here until the end.”

Matching grant helps The Salvation Army serve more families

The Salvation Army food shelves will have a chance to turn around the summer slump in food donations through a matching grant from Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless.

According to Bev Mayfield, envoy at the local Salvation Army, added food donations will help assist both those affected and not affected by recent flooding.

“While it’s always important to give when you can to the local food shelf, this grant will make it possible to increase every gift at a time when donations are down and the need is on the rise,” said Col. Robert Thomson, Salvation Army Northern Division commander, in a news release.

Any financial gift given to a Salvation Army food shelf through the month of July will be proportionally matched with a minimum of \$150 in grant money and up to \$5,000. According to Open Your Heart, the annual event offers a total of \$150,000 in matching funds. Last year Minnesota food shelves raised more than \$1 million in July.

“We can do twice as much with a gift of money through the power of our food shelf networks,” said Thomson. “A dollar goes twice as far and now with this grant it will go even farther.”



FILE PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

Volunteers filling and stacking sandbags and loading pallets took a break while officials checked out the sandbagging machine.

County officials tracking the numbers

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

When Koochiching County officials began tracking flood relief efforts, they were amazed and the numbers were impressive.

Nancy Lee, Public Health and Human Services, tracked the number of volunteers and the hours they spent filling and loading sandbags to protect property.

Lee said volunteers who began immediately were not tracked. But later days brought staggering numbers of daily volunteers: 400; 950; 600; 400; and 129. Sandbagging started most days at 9 a.m. and ended most days around 8 p.m.

“We had big numbers, but it was some of the same people day after day after day,” she said. “It wasn’t like a fresh group every day.”

Lee said volunteers came in all ages and from many places in Koochiching County.

“I saw a number of people from Littlefork, even though it was not their community, they felt a part of the county,” she said.

She said some people who volunteered had a vested interest in protecting their own property, but others whose property was impacted were busy getting sandbags and had to rely on others to help fill the bags that would protect their property.

Lee said she was motivated to tie a few sandbags herself after her mother from North Dakota saw news coverage and called to ask if she’d been sandbagging. She suggested Lee make cookies for volunteers if she was unable to help the sandbagging effort.

“I got out and helped tie (bags) and did other things, but my mother was the impetus that I got out there as soon as I did,” she said.

County commissioners also helped the sandbagging effort, Lee said.

“I was totally impressed,” she said. “I don’t think that would have happened other places. I thanked them and they looked at me funny, like why would I thank them.”

The commitment of the community was even noted by members of the Minnesota National Guard and

emergency officials from the Twin Cities, she said.

“They kept asking ‘How do you do this so well,’” she said. “They said other communities have so much turf protecting and politics and they weren’t seeing any of it here,” she said.

Lee said countywide planning for emergency preparation pulled people together to lead the effort.

A June 10 public health emergency preparedness team, including county commissioners, drew many officials to the table. Then when the real emergency began, those same people wondered about the coincidence, she said.

“In this community, we do what we need to do,” she said. “I don’t think there’s any feeling about ‘that’s not my house so I won’t help,’” she said.

Lee offered some “flood trivia”:

■ On two consecutive days, 50,000 sandbags were filled.

■ Minnesota National Guard soldiers filled pallets with 25 sandbags in 59 seconds.

Meanwhile, Walt Buller, Koochiching County Highway Department, was in charge of the sandbagging operation and said he was proud to be the coordinator of that effort.

He said nine forklifts were operating at one time in the City Beach and later Kerry Park area.

There were no injuries during a lot of commotion, he said.

“There were volunteers, operators, people who wanted sandbags and there were no confrontations, nobody got mad — it was great,” he said.

While all involved hope it’s not needed, Buller said the sandbag filling can begin again quickly.

“We’re all set up, all prepared if we have to go back into bagging and we will go back with one word,” he said. “It’s all prepared should something change and we have to go back into service, and hopefully we don’t have to.”

Buller credited International Falls city crews for helping in the effort.

Koochiching County Board Chairman Rob Ecklund reported Tuesday the county has spent about \$108,000 on sandbags and sand.

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