

Church gives Thanksgiving meals to hundreds

BY LAYLA GARMES
THE CHRONICLE

Mildred Black recently lost her job, but that won't stop her from cooking up a savory Thanksgiving meal for her family this year.

Her family is among the hundreds who will enjoy a free Thanksgiving meal courtesy of Mt. Olive Baptist Church. Mt. Olive volunteers distributed the makings of a traditional Thanksgiving dinner — complete with turkeys, green beans, macaroni and cheese and dinner rolls — to 500 families on Saturday, during the church's annual Thanksgiving Blessings program. Black, a grandmother of three, had her hands full and a smile on her face as she left the church parking lot, where the giveaway took place, on Saturday.

"I think it's wonderful," she said of the effort, which was made possible by donations from church members and organizations from across the community and beyond. "It's God's doing to help other people. To me, it's a blessing."

Residents from across the community flocked to the church in anticipation of the giveaway, an annual tradition at Mt. Olive that Pastor Dr. Charles Gray started more than 30 years ago.

"It's more to ministry than just having church on Sunday," said Gray. "You've got to get out; it's all about helping people."

Dr. Gray's grandson, Charles Michael Gray, organized the giveaway for the first time this year.

"It's been interesting trying to reach out to a lot of the businesses, trying to reach out to people between here and



Mt. Olive Pastor Dr. Charles Gray (right) poses with his son, Michael, and grandson, Charles Michael (left).

Durham," said the younger Gray, a junior at North Carolina Central University and active volunteer in the Durham community.

Because funding for many of the government programs that once assisted families in need has been cut, community-based events like the giveaway are more important than ever, said the 20-year-old.

"We have to do our own part in regard to getting things done," he remarked. "...It's important to be in the community and help others."

Three generations of Grays were involved in the effort this year. Michael Gray, Dr. Gray's son and Charles Michael's father, helped to pack and distribute grocery bags for the giveaway. Having his son and grandson's help and support made the event even more fulfilling for him, Dr. Gray said.

"Last night when I was sitting there and they were doing the bags, tears kind of came into my eyes," he declared. "I said, 'Here are my son and grandson working together.' It makes me feel like I've imparted



James Streater

some of the spirit I have to them, in them picking up the mantle."

Mt. Olive Deacon James Streater belongs to two organizations that contribute to the giveaway — the Winston Lake Senior Golfers Association, which donated \$200 from its annual golf tournament, and the Carolina Cruisers Motorcycle Club. It is a busy time of year for the Carolina Cruisers, who support a variety of holiday efforts, including the city Recreation and Parks Department's Peace Toys for War Toys giveaway and their own food distribution program, which was slated to take place on Monday. The Vietnam veteran said he looks forward to the holiday giving campaigns.

"I just like giving back, helping out as much as a I



Darlene Patten

can," he remarked. "I hate to see kids being without toys and I hate to see people hungry."

Area residents came out in droves to take advantage of Thanksgiving Blessings this year. They began lining up at the church as early as 7 a.m. for the event, which was slated to begin at noon. Volunteers started the giveaway early to accommodate the crowd.

Darlene Patten was among the dozens of church members who volunteered to help with the distribution.

"I hope that they can see Christ in us and know that there are people out there who care about them," she said of the recipients. "Maybe they'll come and visit (the church)."

Concert

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"Automatic," "Jump (For my Love)," "Neutron Dance," and the classic "I'm So Excited." After receiving a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1994, the sisters began a worldwide tour of the Fats Waller musical "Ain't Misbehavin'."

Now in their fifth decade of performing, The Pointer Sisters continue to delight audiences all over the world. The group now consists of original members Anita Pointer and Ruth Pointer and Sadako Johnson, Ruth's granddaughter.

The concert will pro-



Holliday

vide operating funds for the historic performing arts center. Participants may choose to attend a Pre-concert Dinner Party in an elegant, outdoor pavilion adjacent to the theatre or a Pre-concert Cocktail Party in the Renaissance Room, or buy tickets just to the benefit performance.

"Music lovers of all ages will enjoy listening to and dancing to the upbeat music of The Pointer Sisters," said Carolina Theatre President and CEO Keith Holliday.

Ticket packages start at \$75 and are on sale now. Go to www.CarolinaTheatre.com for more information.

Diabetes

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The medical center has earned national recognition for its focus on diabetes treatment. Cash said that the series is named in honor of Irene Wharton, who died from diabetes complications in 1999. Cash named his firm after Irene Wharton and Franklin Gladden, who largely inspired and mentored him.

"Our center focuses on trying to reach underserved populations because diabetes impacts minorities, people in rural areas and low-income people," said Dr. Bell. "We want to provide state-of-the-art understanding of these issues. We want to use these funds to engage people who are involved in the research process, but also to engage the community."

Dr. Bowden agreed, adding, "We are thrilled because contributions to research (on diabetes) is even more critical and essential in the world we live in. And this is perfect timing for this gift because

November is National Diabetes Month. These funds will help underwrite Wake Forest's growth in diabetes and obesity research."

In addition to the announced gift, Cash reminded guests that the Power of One Fund also supports community-wide innovative solutions to three primary issues: homelessness, domestic violence and substance abuse. In the past, the Fund has partnered with the Bethesda Center, Winston-Salem Rescue Mission, Family Services and Salvation Army.

Dr. Eboni Ellis, who recently relocated to Winston-Salem, was one of many attendees to make donations to the Power of One Fund.

"I always want to give to the community, and Algenon provided me so much information on the areas in Winston-Salem where I could make a difference," she said. "There are so many things that the Fund does to help the homeless, and I just want to help any way I can."



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