

Churches partner with nonprofit to feed the needy

Feed our Community Day Slated for Oct. 20 In Riverside

By **BOB UPHUES**
Editor

The Riverside-North Riverside Covenant of Churches has partnered with an Iowa-based nonprofit organization called Outreach to organize a food-packaging event for local food pantries in October.

Feed Our Community Day will be held in the auditorium of Riverside Township Hall, 27 Riverside Road in Riverside from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 20. The Covenant of Churches can accommodate four shifts of 150 volunteers to pack more than 20,000 meals, which will be distributed to feed the area's hungry.

We're trying to make it educational and make an impact on people's lives," said Bill Kanatas, of Outreach in Chicago. Kanatas is facilitating the Outreach food packing event through his own nonprofit venture, Feed 6. Those wishing to make donations and volunteer to work at the food packing event can do so, by visiting online at www.feed6.org and clicking the Feed Our Community Day link under the "upcoming events" tab.

Kanatas is pushing the Covenant of Churches to raise enough money to pack 100,000 meals - that would require \$20,000. But the covenant has pledged to do at least 20,000. They are hoping Outreach can use its ability to reach a larger audience to increase the size of the event in Riverside.

"Our churches are in for our

original commitment," said Jeanine Buttimer, a Feed Our Community Day steering committee member from Riverside Presbyterian Church. "We want to do everything we can, but we look to [Outreach] to go beyond [\$5,000] for fundraising." Fellow steering committee member Jim O'Toole, from Christ Presbyterian Church, said the covenant may be able to reach that 100,000 goal in the future, if the event catches on and becomes an annual happening.

"Down the road, we might be interested in turning it into an annual event," said O'Toole. "We may reach 100,000 with some consistency over the coming years."

Outreach, which was founded by a couple in Union, Iowa, in 2004, has provided 210 million meals to hungry families, he said.

The key to the food-packing event is efficiency. All of the meals are the same - a modified version of macaroni and cheese developed by a University of Iowa professor especially for Outreach.

At food-packing events, volunteers pack and seal individual bags of the mac and cheese (the cheese is a soy product). Each bag will feed six people, according to Outreach. Those bags are packed in boxes which hold 36 bags or 216 meals.

Kanatas said he organized an Outreach event in Fort Myers, Fla., that packed 100,000 meals. Afterward, he said he wondered how long all those meals would sit on a shelf. He expected the answer to be months.

"They told me the food would be gone in a week," said Kanatas, who connected with the Riverside North Riverside Covenant of

Churches through Christ Presbyterian Church in North Riverside. They, in turn, reached out to Riverside Presbyterian Church.

According to Buttimer, the Covenant of Churches signed on enthusiastically. They were looking for an event to replace their annual CROP Walk, which was held in October. This fit perfectly.

"It gives us more volunteers and a greater financial base," said Buttimer.

In addition to online registrations, people interested in volunteering can pick up a registration form at Riverside Presbyterian Church, 116 Barrypoint Road in Riverside, or Christ Presbyterian Church, 2350 8th Ave. in North Riverside.