

By Lloyd Nelson



Photo by: Chris Coyne

La Grange, IL — The big number: 5,000

That's the amount of money raised by sixth-graders at Ogden Avenue School to purchase food and material to package 20,000 pasta and cheese meals.

The plan

About 70 sixth-grade students from Ogden Avenue School recently heard officials from Outreach, a charity based in Union, Iowa, that helps organize food packing events, speak about the importance of combating hunger nationally.

“They got very excited about it,” said Bill Kanatas, regional manager for Outreach. “And the teachers and the parents, they wanted to do something.”

Born from that was the idea to raise money through pledge drives. With the guidance of teachers and involved parent Karen Neidermeyer, Ogden Avenue sixth-graders raised more than \$5,000, which translates into 20,000 Outreach meals of nutritious pasta and cheese for hungry children and their families in the greater Chicago region.

The impact

Raising money was only the first part of the process for the sixth-graders. On Jan. 21, students gathered in their school's cafeteria and listened attentively to the detailed training.

Afterward, they donned aprons, hair nets and gloves and formed into production lines to assemble meals from bins of pasta and soy. They added cheese packages fortified with protein, nutrients and vitamins before carefully weighing and heat-sealing them and placing them into packages.

“It was an amazing feeling,” Kanatas said. “These kids did something to help the community. They were dancing. They were having fun.”

The food was distributed to local food pantries, including St. Francis Xavier in La Grange, to feed a growing population of hungry children — nearly one out of four in northern Illinois, Kanatas said.

For those looking to get involved with Outreach, call (708) 310-5578