

Rotarians learn about Thanksgiving Day dinners

Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 4, 2015 @ 11:57 p.m.

WILLISTON -- Members of the Rotary Club of Williston met on Tuesday (Nov. 3) in the Prudence Ross Fellowship Hall at First Presbyterian Church of Williston, 247 First St., in Williston, as they are inclined to do so every Tuesday - with the official meeting time set to start at 11:45 a.m.

And at this particular meeting, which was well under way by noonish, the ladies and gentlemen of this club listened and learned about the many kindhearted people in various organizations within their city.

There are many individuals who help their neighbors. One might even say many of the residents of Williston love their neighbors.



Nancy Vallario, 81, pauses for a photo with Williston Rotary Club President Blake Fugate.

Vallario, a spry 81-year-old advocate for compassion and understanding, was on the threshold of going on a mission trip to help at an orphanage in East Angola, Africa. Before her two-weeks (plus) charitable trip abroad, she was working on charity at home.

Sewing machines, cloth and other things have been sent to this orphanage and Vallario was invited by leaders in the United Methodist Church to go with them to see the results of giving over the years.

Vallario, who is the mother of Williston Rotarian Frances "Fran" Taylor, came as the guest speaker on Tuesday. Vallario is involved as a leader in a program to provide turkeys and grocery bags to needy families in the Williston area on Thanksgiving too.

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While there is this particularly big project in November, on a regular basis she is involved with the First United Methodist Church of Williston at its food pantry and thrift store.

In fact, Vallario is among the people who helped start the Methodist thrift store in Williston. Buying things there helps a number of charities. Ten percent of the proceeds goes to the Doyle C. Crosby Food Pantry, for instance. And 5 percent goes to the local pregnancy center.

Vallario also helped start a prison ministry, which continues today.

Vallario told the Rotarians that she is thankful to them for helping each year with the baskets of food. Essentially, there is \$25 worth of groceries put in a bag and there is a \$25 turkey for each family. These baskets will be going to 130 needy families this year, she said.

The project has a budget in the \$7,000 range.

Beyond telling Rotarians about this effort, Vallario said she wanted to speak to them concerning collaboration that happens in the community of Williston. She began her speech by mentioning there are far more groups and individuals than the ones she would speak about that day who help their fellow human beings in Williston.

The Doyle C. Crosby Food Pantry is one of the missions of the First United Methodist Church of Williston, but the progress there is an effort that results from six churches participating, she said. The Methodist Church, Holy Family Catholic Church, the First Presbyterian Church, the Crossroads Church and the New Abundant Life Church all help the food pantry.

This food pantry was named in honor of the man who decades ago used to drive around and give people food. He was an insurance salesman.

Back then, the Methodists would collect their “debit” and they would do this by knocking on doors “... to collect \$2 or \$4 or whatever,” she said.

When he came to a family who he thought needed food, he would open the trunk of his car and give them a bag of food.

“And he did that for years,” Vallario said, “until he got too old to do it.”

After that a married couple took up the cause, she said, and that was long before her time with the church. That couple started distributing food at the church. Over time, other churches joined this effort, she said. Now there is a group that is named the Williston Ministerial Organization, she said.

It is administered at the Methodist Church, but the effort is from a conglomeration of churches, she said.

The food pantry is not part of The Children’s Table or anything like that, she said. The pantry in Williston is from people who buy food for their needy neighbors.

All of the churches involved in the food pantry, she said, on certain Sundays collect food to bring to the food bank. They not only bring food, but they volunteer to man the pantry.

Another group that helps feed the needy in Williston is the United States Post Office. The staff in this local branch split some of the food that they collect between the Doyle C. Crosby Food Pantry and the pregnancy center, she said.

The Boy Scouts conduct a food drive in Williston, Vallario said, and they donate to the Doyle C. Crosby Food Pantry. The Woman’s Club of Williston helps very often, Vallario said.

“If I ask them to collect tomatoes, they collect tomatoes,” Vallario said of the Woman’s Club. “For the Woman’s Club, all I have to say is, ‘I need turkey dressing.’ And they put it (that message) in their newsletter and everyone brings turkey dressing.”

Vallario has found that each time she asks for help with the Thanksgiving food baskets, people agree. As for the Rotary Club of Williston, Vallario said she does not even have to ask. The Rotarians come looking for grocery bags to fill for Thanksgiving.

Helping neighbors crosses all boundaries. The churches work together to help people pay for gasoline to go to medical appointments, and to find resources to help pay the co-pay on prescriptions for the destitute too, she said.

The Church of God cooperates with the Williston Ministerial Organization to help people pay electric bills. For instance if a poor person needs help with a \$150 electric bill, then the person

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pays \$50, the Church of God pays \$50 and the ministerial group pays \$50, she said.

The Baptist Church told school district social worker Gail Korn, who is a zealot for needy children, to determine the list for the holiday baskets of food, Vallario said. That is how the churches know the 130 families to present with baskets.

Korn heads the Williston Backpacks4Kidz program, Vallario said, and this is a part of how the families are determined.

These baskets are not withheld from a parent who may have shiny wheels on their car, or may be wearing jewelry, she said, because the food is to help the children have a nice Thanksgiving dinner. Some parents may put a higher priority on a hairdo or a manicure before thinking about their child, she said.

That does not matter. The mission is for families to have a nice Thanksgiving dinner – perhaps with leftovers.

The list comes from Korn, Vallario said, and this takes that stress off of the ministerial group.

The Catholic Church has a thrift store. The Methodist Church has a thrift store. The Baptist Church has a Thrift store. Morriston Baptist Church has a huge program with a food pantry and thrift store, she said.

The Ornan Mason Lodge hosts its Child Safety Day event, as well as participating in other aspects of community aid like the fresh produce they offer to help needy families in the Williston area, every month or so.

She said there are many groups in the area that are civic-minded.

And Vallario said there are many parts of the Bible that show people should help the needy, widows, orphans and the elderly.

Some of those many verses are:

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

-- (KJV)

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He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

-- Proverbs 19:17 (KJV)

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He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

-- Proverbs 14:31 (KJV)

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Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

-- Luke 12:33-34 (KJV)

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If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

-- Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (KJV)

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Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

-- James 1:27 (KJV)

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He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

-- Proverbs 22:9 (KJV)

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Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with [his] hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

-- Ephesians 4:28 (KJV)

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For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

-- Matthew 25:35 (KJV)

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And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

-- Mark 12:29-31 (KJV)

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Vallario said many of these programs are for emergency needs. She sees a calling to uncover a more self-sustainable answer to help people learn about the value of working.

She said there may be a cultural problem for a child who is three or more generations into a family that sees welfare as the only way to live. Climbing out of poverty can be a struggle beyond socio-economic factors if a family has belief that welfare is the way to go.

Some time ago, the Florida Department of Corrections provided funding for some Boy Scouts troops to help children from poverty-stricken families be part of that group, she said. That was stopped for five or more years now.

However, she sees that could have been a program to offer hope and insight about earning. For instance, Scouts earn merit badges. They are not just given to them for showing up.

Some of the needy people would not understand the concept of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps.

"They wouldn't know a bootstrap if they saw it," she said.

She told a story about one girl who was in an at-risk Girl Scout program, however, that showed this particular child may not have learned what some Scout leaders might have hoped.

Vallario asked the third grade Girl Scouts to say one thing they wanted and how they would expect to get it. This girl said she wanted a room of her own. To obtain that, however, her plan was to have a baby, because then she would qualify for more state aid.

"That was her bootstrap," Vallario said. "Just think about that when we are dealing with people who have always been in poverty. That was how she was going to get her own place."

Vallario said she was discouraged, because she had worked with this bright child for two years, every week in Scouts, and that was her answer – she couldn't wait to be old enough to have a baby.

She said Rotarians can help lead children away from living in "the projects."

As for Williston, "We have a community to be proud of," she said, because the people in this city give to help their less fortunate neighbors.

The members and guests always enjoy a lunch during the meeting. On this day, it was fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, tossed salad, homemade brownies and soft drinks.

The officers of the club are President W. Blake Fugate, President-Elect Jana Carlisle, Secretary Danny Etheridge, Treasurer Matt Brooks and Sergeant-At-Arms James Mixson.

The meetings offer chances for members to remember what Rotary Club is all about, as well as to enjoy food, fun and fellowship.