

Football players rally to get kitchen serving food again

** Holy Family Church facility rebounds after thieves ruin refrigeration equipment.*

By MERYL WILLIAMS

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The Upper Arlington High School football team is getting a good workout this summer, and two-a-days haven't even started yet.

Players have been volunteering their time at the Holy Family Church soup kitchen, 57 S. Grubb St. Downtown, as a service project idea from their coach, Mike Boggs.

"There's a lot of organizations that support this place," said Boggs, who helps serve lunch every other Thursday alongside his players.

Boggs first got involved with the kitchen several years ago, with fellow alumni from Upper Arlington High School.

"It was mostly (alumni) from the baseball team," said Boggs. "They're 1973, '74, and '75 grads."

Four years ago, Boggs decided to ask the current football team members to give back. Now, during the summer, five to seven players come each Thursday for the lunch shift, coming in at 10 a.m. and leaving around 3 p.m.

"They come to serve and clean," said Boggs. "They do whatever Frances tells them to do."

Frances Carr, the director of the kitchen, jokes along with the boys volunteering. She is also the person many volunteers see as the driving force behind the kitchen.

"I believe in what I do," Carr said simply. "As long as I'm here, I'll make sure we're open."

Carr began volunteering in the kitchen 23 years ago, and has moved up to the only paid position offered.

"I wouldn't trade one day, honey," she said. "Good days and bad days, the good always outweighs the bad."

Even when tragedy strikes, she said.

In late May, copper thieves came through the kitchen and stole compressors from their refrigeration system. The kitchen was forced to close May 28 and lost more than \$90,000 worth of food.

"They broke my heart," said Carr. "It was so devastating, and so many people had to go without something to eat."

But the kitchen reopened June 16, with new cooling equipment donated and installed by Johnson Controls. The Catholic Diocese of Columbus replaced the food lost after the theft, and an anonymous Notre Dame alumnus donated \$15,000 to the soup kitchen.

The Plumbers and Pipefitters Union in Columbus reached out, as well as many others, and \$40,000 was raised to benefit the kitchen.

"Republic (Services, Inc.) sent truck after truck to take (spoiled food) away," said Carr. "They said they wanted us back up and running, and God bless, they did get us back up and running."

"It didn't take much," Boggs said. "A few phone calls made, a few e-mails sent, and people stepped forward."

Boggs credits Carr with the efforts made to help the soup kitchen in its time of need.

"It's unbelievable what Frances does," said Boggs. "She's an amazing woman."

Carr also exercises an open door policy with those who visit the kitchen.

"They can come in and talk to me, and see if I can help them out, or just listen to them," she said.

She said no one is turned away from the kitchen unless they are drunk or disorderly. Patrons are encouraged to get seconds and thirds to take home.

"It feels good to help with the church," said Alex Boggs, 15, Mike's nephew, and a football player.

"I think it's good community service," said Michael Badea, 16. "It's a fun way to make a difference, and you get to know the people."

Jean Crawford, mother of a player, volunteers with her son, Mark, 18.

"This is a way to use their strength and skills to give back," she said. "One day, they moved 8,000 pounds of canned goods for Frances."

Crawford said it's a five-minute drive to the kitchen from Upper Arlington, so the boys know they don't have to go far to lend a hand. She said she can tell it affects them when they see boys their own age on the other side of the counter.

"When kids come through, the players seem most impressed by that," Crawford said.

"Those are the stories I hear on the way back to the parking lot."

"It's a fun way to make a difference, and you get to know the people."

--*Michael Badea*