

Volunteers know

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By Gwen Sisson For the WPT

As a shoebox donor from First Baptist Church of Eupora said, "If you make a child happy, you have done something good."

Faye Dewberry of FBC Mathiston said she is committed to Operation Christmas Child because "a child with nothing will receive something for Christmas."

Dewberry serves as a volunteer in the Webster County Collection Center for Operation Christmas Child sponsored by Samaritan's Purse. This year during National Collection Week, Nov. 11-18, Dewberry and other volunteers from First Baptist Church of Mathiston collected 3,090 boxes donated from churches, families and individuals throughout the area, processed them and prepared them to be sent to Atlanta, where they will be sent to children around the world.

This year, Webster County collected 552 more boxes than in 2011.

"The love of God is in each box," said Lloyd Dewberry, a volunteer from FBC Mathiston. "For many of these children, it is a chance for them to learn about Christ and accept Him as their Savior."

Robert Burdine also served as a volunteer last week at the Webster County Collection Center. He said he loves to serve God in any way he can and is thankful he is able to do it. "These boxes show needy children around the world how much God loves them," Burdine said. "And that's important."

Other volunteers at the Webster County OCC Collection Center last week were Brenda Burdine and Paige Allen. These volunteers and others from FBC Mathiston, Mantee Baptist and Lollar's Grove Baptist traveled to the OCC shipping relay center for the Southeast in Atlanta this week, as they fulfill their calling to assist with this mission program. Dewberry said a team from Walthall Baptist will be going to Atlanta in December, and other volunteers from throughout Webster County will be making the trip to ship shoeboxes.

The Rev. Travis Gray of First Baptist Church of Eupora said he feels Operation Christmas Child is an important mission project because it causes people to take the focus off of themselves.

"It reminds us of what Thanksgiving is really all about and moves us into the Christmas season with a spirit of thanks for all we have and all we receive," Gray said.

At FBC Eupora, families and individuals made most of the donations this year, as they have done faithfully in the past, but this year, the church hosted an OCC Packing Party event with donations of gifts and other shoebox items. The youth and children of the church packed 50 boxes for Operation Christmas Child, and included letters to encourage correspondence.

At Bellefontaine United Methodist Church, Operation Christmas Child was the mission project during Vacation Bible School this summer. Each child watched the videos, wrote letters, wrapped and packed their boxes. Shipping costs were donated by adults in the church. VBS organizers said that the most important thing for children is to learn that "teaching them that not everyone has some of the basic necessities that we take for granted is an important lesson to learn."

In 2011, Samaritan's Purse collected more than 8.6 million shoe box gifts, including over six million from the United States. This year, they are aiming for 10 million shoebox gifts.

Shoebox gifts packed from Mississippi and Alabama will be processed in Atlanta and will be shipped to children in countries including, Panama, Ukraine, Macedonia, Bahamas, Uganda, Seychelles, Namibia, Kenya, Benin, Zambia, the Dominican Republic and one country undisclosed for security reasons.

Shoeboxes are given to children through Samaritan's Purse volunteers who travel to the countries to pass out boxes. Volunteers then follow up with the "The Greatest Gift" discipleship program to help children in these countries learn more about the love of God, after seeing his love in action through shoebox gifts.

For more about Operation Christmas Child, go to www.samaritianspurse.org.