

Times-Herald

Maritime Academy in Vallejo gathers up a ton of food for the needy

By Tony Burchyns / Times-Herald

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It took five men to load more than a ton of food into a waiting delivery truck Tuesday afternoon. But the job was done with military-like precision.

"Wow, these guys are great," said Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano driver Steve Burdette, referring to his California Maritime Academy helpers.

The whole load -- a full three pallets -- was packed up and ready to go within 20 minutes.

"This is probably the biggest pickup of the week," Burdette added with a smile.

For a school of only 800 students, it sure can put on a big food drive.

Organized by the Veterans Students Association, the campus-wide effort collected some 2,228 food items this month.

Everything from dried potatoes and oatmeal to macaroni and cheese was piled into bins placed around the cozy campus. The entire load was stored in the campus metal shop until it was picked up.

Not only were food bank officials duly impressed, but they said the donation couldn't have come at a better time.

"It is amazing that the students collected that much food to help their neighbors in need," food bank spokeswoman Lisa Sherrill said. "We distributed 12.6 million pounds of food last year and approximately one million came from food drives just like this."

Other sources include corporations and businesses, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Feeding America network.

Those behind it were predictably modest.

"The idea came from the school traditionally having food drives,"

said freshman Mark Boehland, president of the Veteran Students Association and former U.S. Coast Guard member. "We decided as a veterans club that we wanted to take a leadership role, build camaraderie and teamwork, and help people less fortunate than ourselves this holiday season."

To encourage more giving, the club held a competition to see which of the California State University campus's six student divisions could collect the most food. The winning group gets to miss one morning formation, which is a regular 7:30 a.m. assembly on the quad.

Food bank officials say the demand for food has increased exponentially over the last few years. Fortunately, so have donations, Sherrill said.

"But as the demand continues to increase," Sherrill added, "so will the need."

How to help:

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