

FOOD BANK/Delivery Becomes a Problem for Needy

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went to food drops throughout Eastern Washington.

The apple harvest alleviated unemployment, but by the mid-November, harvest work had dried up. Occasional pruning jobs form the bulk of winter work.

This has forced many families to move into Mattawa, according to Tomas Villanueva, a state Department of Social and Health Services community outreach specialist.

The newcomers seek work, which is hard to find in other parts of the state as well.

Many unemployed farm workers and their families in Mattawa have come to depend increasingly on the food bank, housed in a trailer behind Our Lady of the Desert Roman Catholic Church.

While the food is free, thanks to Northwest Harvest and volunteer drivers abound, the Mattawa food bank's biggest problem is finding gas money for delivery. Farm workers volunteer their old pickups for the trip, but they can't afford the gas, Villanueva said.

The association's van needs repairs and can no longer carry the cargo.

"You can't get food if you can't get it delivered," said Linda Hall, warehouse coordinator for Northwest Harvest.

She laughs while retelling the story of an emergency run. "I said don't risk your life over food," Hall said.

But Manuel Cuevas and a handful of Mattawa volunteers were determined.

"The parking lot was like a skat-



KELLY GLASSCOCK/Yakima Herald-Republic file

Tony Andrade cleans up the clothing area of the food bank in Mattawa in August just before its closed.

ing rink," Hall recalled. "They had trouble backing up to the loading dock. But they made it.

"These guys are tough, a little crazy," Hall said, laughing.

The volunteers took two pallets, carrying approximately 3,000 pounds of fresh, frozen and canned foods east over the Columbia River and back to Mattawa.

That food ran out Thanksgiving Day.

"We need a lot of baby food, infant formula, cereal, baby cans, milk and pampers. Right now we are trying to get funds from other places. We really need funds for gas money and insurance," she said.

Barajas helps by paying for gas out of her own pocket, at \$20 a week, it can add up for the mother of seven.

Even Villanueva, a DSHS worker who covers much of Central Washington, quietly helped out by volunteering his own pickup for a while, Hall said.

Although the Yakima Valley Community College truck driving program helps with some deliveries, the schedules are not always

workable. And so volunteers scrape together the gas money to travel the long distances between the warehouses and the food bank.

Villanueva said farm workers are trying to get out of Mattawa. As farm work dries up, many immigrants have found jobs in the Seattle area in the restaurant and hotel industries, he said.

Those who can't will become increasingly dependent on assistance in an area with little in the way of government resources.

Louis Bunkelman, the newly retired DSHS regional administrator for Moses Lake and the Mattawa area, said the number of general assistance cases, now called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, has climbed only slightly, from 73 to 80 to date. But Bunkelman expects the number of applicants to swell as winter presses on.

He thinks that despite the worsening labor situation, many farm workers from Mexico have decided to stay there throughout the winter. Most of the farm workers in Mattawa are of Mexican origin.

"We are hearing that because of the (Sept. 11) incident, with borders tightened, folks are not leaving because they are afraid they can't come back, he said."

But it means that still more people will depend on a food bank housed in a trailer.