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Office of University Communications

September 16, 2013

Group Seeks Food Donations in Honor of September's Designation as Hunger Action Month

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Many Americans are still struggling to put food on the table, a full four years after the global recession ended, a new poll by Gallup shows. “Twenty percent of people polled last month said that they sometimes didn’t have enough money to buy food for themselves or their family, the highest percentage since 2011,” reported Jeff Black, staff writer for NBC news. “In addition, the poll indicates that Americans’ ability to afford food has yet to recover to the levels seen in 2008, when the United States was in one of deepest economic slumps since the Great Depression of the 1930s.”

This new data reveals a consistent problem in the land of opportunity. Poverty remains the leading cause of hunger in the United States, with an estimated 40 million people living below the poverty line and at risk of going hungry. For America’s children, this means the meals they receive at school are likely the only food to which they have consistent access.

Lou Ann Scates is the registrar at Gardner-Webb University, and the continuing problem of childhood hunger strikes her to the core. “I’ve been passionate about this issue for years,” Scates shared. “It hits me deep and pulls at my soul.” She hopes a national initiative sponsored by Feeding America and promoted by the Food Network this month will remind people that hunger in America is a solvable problem.

Feeding America is the nation’s leading domestic hunger-relief charity. Their mission is to feed America’s hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and to engage the country in the fight to end hunger. As a result, they’ve named September as Hunger Action Month, when the Feeding America nationwide network of food banks unite to urge individuals to take action in their communities. Their mission is to create a movement that has a real and lasting impact toward the goal of ending hunger in America. Scates hopes the campaign will shed light on the issue and instill in others a desire to become part of the solution at a grassroots level.

A few years ago, she and GWU Biology Professor Susan Manahan read an article about the pandemic of child hunger, and both women immediately wanted to do something about it locally. They put their heads together in 2010 and the result of their brainstorming is what is

now known as the *Bulldog Backpack* program. The initiative provides non-perishable food items to hungry Springmore Elementary School (Boiling Springs, N.C.) students and their families on a regular basis.

By working with the school's social worker, Scates and Manahan identified approximately 20 children whose family situations were desperate. While the families can manage one modest meal each day, and students benefit from free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs at school, a family's food resources often become most scarce over the weekend. Social workers say that's when kids often go hungry.

To address this need, Manahan and Scates began collecting backpacks and food items from the Gardner-Webb community. Now, each Friday, the backpacks are stuffed with food and delivered to the students' bus drivers, who give them to the students as they head home for the weekend.

"I often get a warm, happy feeling on Saturday mornings after I have delivered the backpacks, especially in the winter," Manahan shared. "I am thinking that some child is drinking hot chocolate or eating hot cereal from the backpack when they might otherwise be going without."

When the program first began, the backpacks were given to 15 families on a biweekly basis. Now, dozens of Gardner-Webb faculty, staff, and students give regularly and several classes have embraced the project as a service-learning opportunity.

To continue making a difference, the Bulldog Backpack program is in constant need of food donations. Items needed include: boxed juices, oatmeal with individual serving packs, mac-n-cheese singles, pop tarts, individual fruit cups, applesauce, spaghetti-o's or ravioli, canned soup, pudding cups, nuts, trail mix, dried fruit, raisins, unpopped popcorn in small packages, Vienna sausages, franks and beans, breakfast bars, peanut butter crackers, etc.

Donations are now being accepted in large receptacles outside the Registrar's Office in the Dover Campus Center, and a food drive is currently being planned for the Sept. 28 home football game against Point University (West Point, Ga.), to be held at 6 p.m. at Spangler Stadium. Members of the Ruby Hunt YMCA and the Boiling Springs Area Rotary Club have provided donations and the GWU Chemistry Honor Society packed backpacks several times last academic year and will continue to assist with the project.

For more information on the Bulldog Backpack program, contact Lou Ann Scates (lscates@gardner-webb.edu) at 704-406-4263 or Susan Manahan (smanahan@gardner-webb.edu) at 704-406-4370. To find out about other food assistance resources in the Cleveland County, N.C. area, contact the United Way of Cleveland County (www.uwclevco.org); the Greater Cleveland County Baptist Association (www.gccba.org); or

the Salvation Army (704-482-0375); the Shelby Lions Club Surplus Commodities Distribution (704-692-3584); or the Cleveland County Potato Project (www.ccpotatoproject.org).

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.