

## New home helps Food Bank expand mission



“Food banking at its best is about respect and compassion.”

So said Susannah Morgan, chief executive officer of the Oregon Food Bank Network. Morgan was the keynote speaker at Saturday’s dedication event for the Josephine County Food Bank’s new warehouse and office facility at Raptor Creek Farm on Upper River Road west of Grants Pass.

More than 60 percent of the food distributed by the local food bank arrives via the Oregon Food Bank Network.

“The hungry in our community have an economic problem, not a moral problem,” Morgan said, adding that she “salutes this community” for

recognizing this fact.

Morgan was just one of several speakers who helped kick off the open house at the 13,000- square-foot, \$1.7 million facility. More than 200 people were on hand for her speech, and afterward many more were still filtering in for the two-hour event, which included refreshments, live music, face painting and, of course, information about the Food Bank.

Morgan emphasized that hunger is a complex problem. The first aspect is feeding people who are hungry today. She called the effort “important moral work” and said that providing healthy, nutritious food is as important as the quantity of food.

The second aspect of dealing with the problem of hunger is helping people get to a point where they no longer need food assistance. Toward that end, food banks throughout the state and nation work with other agencies to help clients pursue education and job training that will lift them out of poverty.

The final aspect in addressing the problem of hunger falls to all of us, in building an economy in which people can gain employment that allows them to support themselves and their families, Morgan said.

Raptor Creek Farm is on a small portion of a 250-acre tract of land owned by the city of Grants Pass.

The community garden that produces around 50,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables each year currently occupies just 2.5 acres.

There are 18 additional acres on the north side of Upper River Road and an option to use 40 more acres south of the road.

Josephine County Food Bank Operations Manager Sam Engel said the amount of land under cultivation has thus far been kept small because of lack of refrigerated storage space at the Food Bank’s former warehouse in southeast Grants Pass. Because of the greatly expanded refrigerated storage space available at the new warehouse, the Food Bank will be able to put many more acres into productive use, Engel said.

Another speaker, Grants Pass Mayor Darin Fowler, emphasized the need to make good nutrition available to everyone in the community.

“We need to get back to the basics as far as our food source goes,” Fowler said. Americans are finally getting it — you have to eat healthier.”

That opportunity should not be limited only to those who have prospered in a difficult economy, he added.

Fowler also thanked the people who came to the city with the idea of establishing the Raptor Creek Farm, as well as the new warehouse, which has been five years in the making.

“This is what government is supposed to do,” he said, adding it his belief that the city’s acquisition of the 250 acres and its decision to turn a portion of it over to the Food Bank was a good use of taxpayer money.

He said Food Bank supporters “dreamed big” and he urged everyone in the room on Saturday to “keep dreaming big.”

Several speakers on Saturday used their time to thank the many donors, large and small, who came together to make the new warehouse a reality. Among major financial donors are Wal-Mart, Evergreen Federal Bank, the Meyer Memorial Trust and the Oregon Food Bank Network.

Saturday's event also served to kick off the Food Bank's "Million Meal" campaign, which aims to raise \$200,000 in the next two months, enough money to provide 1 million meals to local people in need.

Food Bank staff said that while those numbers may sound impressive, the reality is that the Food Bank provides about 2 million meals a year, so the campaign will provide funding for just a six-month period.

The Josephine County Food Bank feeds about 12,000 people each month, an estimated 3,500 of whom are children. Those interested in making a donation may send checks to the Josephine County Food Bank, P.O. Box 2380, Grants Pass, OR 97528. Call 541-479-5556 for more information.

*PHOTO: Oregon Food Bank CEO, Susannah Morgan, tells of her experiences with recipients of food bank services.*