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## GUEST VIEWPOINT

Lane children require help with hunger

By Pat Farr

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As we focus on the issues of hunger and poverty during Oregon Hunger Awareness Week, April 23-29, childhood nutrition is one of the most significant issues. Thousands of children in Lane County today do not receive the nutrition they need to live a healthy life.

One out of every three children in Lane County will eat from an emergency food box at least once this year, an alarming statistic that illustrates the number of families who sometimes struggle to make ends meet. Put that in perspective: If you see 27 kids getting off a school bus, statistically, nine will rely on an emergency food box or other FOOD for Lane County program this year.

In a survey of emergency food box recipients, 22 percent of households with children had to reduce the size of their children's meals, and more than a third had to do this almost every month.

Over time, poor nutrition and hunger result in a variety of health problems, including iron deficiency, anemia, diabetes, childhood obesity and more frequent hospitalization for other serious illnesses. That impedes academic performance by causing students to miss school, limits their ability to focus in the classroom and delays their cognitive development.

FOOD for Lane County relies on partnerships with local organizations and individuals to help feed children. During Hunger Awareness Week, we invite everyone to join us. Below are a few examples of how companies have helped local children have the nutrition they need to lead happy, healthy lives.

- Three locally owned companies - Golden Temple, Glory Bee Foods and Grain Millers - formulate, package and donate a nutritious cereal that we distribute all over Lane County to children who may otherwise miss meals. Cereal for Youth sends 14,000 of these snack-sized portions of organic cereal each month to more than 20 schools and after-school programs.
- The Erwin Martin Rexius Group at Smith Barney recently partnered with us in a pilot program to distribute healthy snacks to kids as they leave school on Friday afternoons. The goal is to provide food for the weekend, when they don't get lunches through the free and reduced-price meal program at school.
- Our regular volunteers are essential to our service. Ray and Audrey Bradshaw are retired educators from the Bethel School District. They regularly volunteer in our Food Rescue Kitchen to repack and process nutritious food that otherwise might end up in the landfill. They are an example of the many volunteers who have decided that getting food to hungry people is paramount in how they spend their time. FOOD for Lane County volunteers will contribute more than 60,000 hours of their time this year to help us fulfill our mission.
- Last year, Northwest Community Credit Union and Umpqua Bank stepped in to help us in a very tight spot. These businesses paid their employees to "volunteer" during business hours to help launch our annual Summer Lunch Program. Without

their help, our program would have been delayed by two weeks and children would have been without meals. During the summer months, this program provides more than 124,000 free lunches annually to school-age children in Lane County.

I commend the people of Lane County for stepping up to help while government funding and support is declining. The local support has been and continues to be delivered in many ways.

Anyone can join the many dedicated people and organizations of Lane County who provide their valuable time, money, food and services to ensure that the children of our community are happy and healthy.

The call for action continues: We will serve more than 100 agencies and more than 80,000 people in Lane County this year. I am thankful to the people of this county for their ongoing support.

*Pat Farr, a former member of the Eugene City Council and the state House of Representatives, is executive director of FOOD for Lane County.*