

Medical center dishes out Thanksgiving early

By Michael Sorba
Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO — Thanksgiving got started early Tuesday here thanks to about 50 volunteers from St. Bernardine Medical Center and its Family Focus Center.

The volunteers dished out food and drinks to people from the neighborhood throughout the evening.

The Family Focus Center has hosted the complimentary feast for needy families for the past 13 years, said Linda McDonald, vice president of mission services at St. Bernardine.

"We started with four or five volunteers cooking for about 50 people," she said. "We've grown quite a bit since then."

In the back of the center at 1931 E St. about 30 long, fold-out tables were set up under a broad, white canopy.

More than 400 people were able to enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal. About 800 pieces of turkey, 600 pieces of ham, 180 pounds of mashed potatoes, 200 pounds of stuffing, 100 pounds of corn, 160 pounds of fruit salad, 500 rolls, 30 gallons of punch, and 10 gallons of gravy were handed out.

As people finished their meals, volunteers — including members of the San Ber-



Anthony Ortiz picks out a free jacket Tuesday at the St. Bernardine Medical Center's Family Focus Center in San Bernardino.

LaFonzo Carter
Staff Photographer

nardino High School boys basketball team — cleared plates.

The team's head coach, Darin Graham, got the team involved three years ago to show players the value of volunteering and serving the community.

"There are other things out there besides basketball," Graham said. "As long as we've

done this no one has ever said 'I don't want to do this.' Everybody wants to do it ... Volunteering makes these kids more well-rounded individuals and it makes their experience as a student athlete more fulfilling."

Team captain Tim Harris, a 16-year-old senior, has helped out at the dinner since

Graham got the team involved.

Tim started out picking up trash and clearing tables, but on Tuesday he had worked his way up to serving punch.

"It feels good to help out," Tim said. "I know if I was in their situation I'd want help too."

Vera Jimenez, 28, of San Bernardino brought her two children Mark, 9, and Leo, 8, to enjoy the meal.

"This is the first year we've come," Jimenez said. "But it's been really nice. My kids are full, I'm stuffed ... Money's tight this year so we won't have much of a Thanksgiving, but this really helps to make up for it."

McDonald said that for those less fortunate, the meal may have been the best they've had in a long time.

About 30 food baskets packed with dinner rolls, vegetables, potatoes and a voucher for a free turkey at Stater Bros. Markets were also handed out to families in need. St. Bernardine employees donated most of the food in the baskets.

"It's a good thing to give to others," McDonald said. "It's a good example to provide to the kids and the community."

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