

Sumner High School leadership students host a holiday extravaganza, complete with dinner, presents and Santa Claus

BY AVANI NADKARNI
of The Herald

Many teenagers participate in food and toy drives during the holidays, but more than 100 Sumner High School students took it one step further: They created a winter wonderland for the entire community.

The school's gym was transformed for the annual community dinner on Dec. 12 with multiple decorated Christmas trees, a sleigh packed to the brim with toys and Santa Claus milling about and posing for photographs. But the most important part to many Sumner families was the buffet of turkey, gravy, mashed potatoes, vegetables, pies and cakes — all provided for free to anyone in the community. By the time the doors opened at noon, the line snaked around the corner.

"It's just a really good atmosphere to celebrate the holidays and just be together in (our) own community," said high school ASB president Sarah Dorfner, who helped organize the event. "Anyone can come. The atmosphere is very welcoming."

The students, mostly from Sumner High School's leadership class, didn't stop with the free buffet. Each child got a free photo with Santa Claus, the high school's jazz band and choir

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

There would be no community dinner without Sumner High School's leadership class, but they said it also wouldn't exist without the donations.

"We've gotten a lot of ... donations, that's where a lot of this comes from," event fundraising chair Carson Blankenship said. Sumner's Starbucks provided provided about

provided free entertainment and each family got to leave with a bagful of items collected from a school-wide food and toy drives. In addition, each family received a raffle ticket and had a chance to win gift certificates. One family even took home a fully-decorated Christmas tree that was at the event.

Leadership teacher John Norlin said he thinks the best part was seeing the students take the initiative for the entire event.

"I'm just the advisor, they do all the work," Norlin said. "So many times with kids ... there's still a disconnect. They bring in food, but there's no connection to the people who need it. Here, they are interacting with those people, helping those people firsthand."

To do so is a lot

of 10 employees to help Sumner School District's food service workers help prepare and dole out the food. The Starbucks also provided all the coffee for the dinner.

The Toys R Us in Puyallup gave the organizers a 20 percent discount, which Blankenship said came in handy when taking donated money to buy toys to give out the each child.

Sumner's Fred Meyer donated a \$100 gift card to give away in a raffle.

of organizing, said dinner chair Kaylee Holloway, a senior at Sumner High School. This year, for example, the organizers didn't receive the \$1,000 Starbucks grant they've received in years past for the event. Undaunted, Holloway and fundraising chair Carson Blankenship brainstormed with the other organizers, including Dorfner, and held creative fundraising events, such as a lunch time "Money Minute," where students scrambled to fill a jar with change in just a minute.

"When something like this arises ... people want to back it even more with the economy being down," Dorfner said. "People in the community like what we're doing."

Indeed, after the organizers put out the call, people began responding. The Rotary Club of Sumner dropped off extra toys and money, families of students wrote checks for as much as \$500 and a Sumner High School teacher even quietly

Please see **COMMUNITY**, page A9



Herald photo/Avani Nadkarni

Community dinner fundraising chair Carson Blankenship and event chair Kaylee Holloway, both Sumner High School seniors, organize the boxed food donated by SHS students and staff to give out to the attendees as part of their goody bag.

Students give a gift to entire Sumner community

COMMUNITY

continued from page A8

dropped \$580 in the jar. "I thought that was really amazing on his part," Dorfner said.

\$3,000. The leadership class began stepping up individually, too. When they realized that gallons of milk usually donated for the dinner wouldn't be there this year, Blankenship said every student offered to bring in a few gallons each.

"Kaylee just mentioned that we may have a problem," Blankenship said. "And every-

pretty cool."

The school's students stepped up again when 150 volunteers were needed for the day of the event to greet attendees, to act as waiters and to help set up and clean up.

"We have football players volunteering, we have people from FFA, from drama, all

Dakota Klemme, who was in charge of advertising for the event. "Everybody really pitched in."

In the spirit of allowing the entire school to participate, Holloway said she asked people who were talented in art to help create decorations and asked the construction class to build a collapsible sleigh

that could also be used in future years.

"Oh, this is wonderful," said first-time attendee Bob Chapman, who brought his 9-year-old son Brenden. "It has been great for both of us."

Sumner School District Superintendent Gil Mendoza, who stayed all day to help greet and serve visitors, sang praises

for the students and also for Norlin.

"Mr. Norlin just inspires them to the maximum," Mendoza said. "What an amazing group of students this school has."

Sumner Reporter Avani Nadkarni can be reached at 253-841-2481 ext. 314 or by e-mail at avnadkarni@puyallupherald.com