

First, Mountain Home, hosts EGGstravaganza



On Saturday, April 11, First Church of Mountain Home hosted a large community Easter event – an EGGstravaganza – that drew more than 1,200 people.

Egg hunts happened every 30 minutes from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for all ages. Age groups were separated so younger children had an equal chance to gather eggs. Food and other family activities were available, and vendors had exhibits, complete with games and prizes.

The Mountain Home church provided this event on a small church budget, according to Tommy Foster, associate pastor of students.

“In today’s economy, many churches are struggling to find an inexpensive yet fun filled event that

will meet the needs of their community,” Foster said. “We may have stumbled on a method that churches large and small can use to reach those families in need.”

First Church handpicked the vendors, waiving the usual vendor fee.

“It was important to us to provide a full-scale Easter event that met the needs of young families in our community without breaking our budget,” said David Johnson, pastor. “We felt that instead of spending thousands of dollars and hoping the community showed up, we would utilize our campus and host a community event for other organizations free of charge. As a result, we felt sure the community would attend because community retailers and organizations were inviting their

clientele to the event.”

Edd Spurlock, executive pastor, said church leaders knew the egg hunt would be the main draw for the community, but they wanted people to stay on the church campus longer than the 10 minutes it takes for an Easter egg hunt.

“By providing the families with other activities and food, they have a reason to stay on campus for an hour or more and experience a true community Easter event,” Spurlock said. “Not only were we able to provide 25 plus children’s activities outside of the Easter egg hunt, but we were able to provide them at no cost to the church because the activities and prizes were provided by the vendors.”

More than 200 First Church members volunteered to assist with parking, greeting, registration, hiding eggs, selling drinks and working with families who needed assistance or simply wanted to visit. More than 50 youth helped by hiding eggs, face painting, selling drinks and hamburgers, clowning in an Easter bunny costume, helping with the mini train ride and presenting a puppet show every 30 minutes that told the Easter story.

“Many times when a church provides a community event, the church members spend most of their time and energy running the event,” Johnson said. “Unfortunately, this leaves little or no time for the church members to be doing something just as important, and that is building relationships with the families that are visiting.

“We loved the fact that because the community organizations were running the booths and activities, our people were free to mix and mingle and provide a special place for families young and old to enjoy the Easter event.”

Vendors included Home Depot, PETCO, Humane Society, local restaurants, local hospitals, radio stations, a local university, Arkansas Game and Fish, a local state park and

other non-profit organizations that play a large role in the community.

The main cost to the church were the 10,000 eggs filled with candy the church provided to the children at the Easter egg hunts.

“More than half the eggs and candy were donated by our church members,” Spurlock said. “Basic plastic Easter eggs are not expensive, so even the eggs we bought from our budget were a minimal cost compared to other big event expenses.”

More than 80 percent of the people registered at the EGGstravaganza event were not members of the host church.

All who attended the event were asked to register at a registration station using laptops.

“As the families arrive, we directed them through a ‘turnstile’ type of registration area,” Johnson said. “We inputted their information in less than 60 seconds per family. As we typed in their information, a greeter was already letting them know how excited we were they were here and gave them needed information about the Easter egg hunts and all the other activities available.”

He said an email was sent to each family, likely awaiting them in their inboxes before they arrived home. It thanked them for attending and invited them back on Sunday morning to Easter services at First Church.

“We will also follow up with them over the next several weeks with phone calls and other forms of communication,” Johnson said.

More than 1,200 people attended Easter Sunday morning services. About 200 who attended were people registered during the EGGstravaganza, according to Foster.

“The Easter EGGstravaganza event is simply a means to a greater end,” Johnson added. “The desired result was that they come back Easter Sunday morning to hear the greatest story ever told: the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is our true measuring stick of success.”

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building project. He also made a presentation to Millard and Theta Aude of the Olds Foundation, in appreciation for the grant.

Johnson summarized the history of disaster relief work in the association, pinpointing its beginning as March 1, 1997, when a tornado hit Arkadelphia.

“Our disaster relief program was literally born out of that tornado,” Johnson said, noting the first disaster relief team had been trained 10 days before the tornado hit. Though trained, he said, none had any actual experience, but they spent the next 12 days gaining that experience right in their own area.

Then, on June 10, 1997, the association met to launch a full-scale disaster relief program.

Red River teams have been called out to serve in 20 disasters since, most outside Arkansas.

“While Christ was on Earth, He fed the multitudes,” Johnson said. “... We want to follow His example.”

He expressed appreciation to an

electrician, who donated time and equipment for the wiring of the new facility, and the volunteers who did the wiring and construction within the facility.

Bill Cantrell, ABSC disaster relief coordinator, addressed the crowd and led the prayer of dedication.

Cantrell noted that 2008 was a record year for Arkansas Baptist disaster relief efforts as teams from across the state responded to 12 disasters, nine of them within Arkansas.

“Facilities like this help the growth of disaster relief work,” Cantrell said. “It will help equip our volunteers.”

He said when disasters hit, disaster relief volunteers minister effectively to people who are hurting.

“We need to be prepared when disasters strike,” he said, “and this facility will help volunteers be ready.”

Cantrell praised the Red River volunteers who “have gone above and beyond” what could be expected of them in disaster relief work.