

Thankful he can help

Braden hopes his contribution helps dining hall effort grow

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Stockton resident and Oakland pitcher Dallas Braden serves the lunch crowd at St Mary's Interfaith Dining Hall.

CALIXTRO ROMIAS/The Record

By **Bob Highfill**

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STOCKTON - Fane Davis doesn't really know who Dallas Braden is.

She and her children visit the St. Mary's Interfaith Dining Hall every day. Their lives don't allow for many diversions.

Give Back challenge

St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services is asking all of its volunteers and anyone who wants to help to take part in a new event on May 19, the Give Back Challenge, to provide service projects on the St. Mary's campus. Information: (209) 467-0703.

"I know he's some sort of sports person," said Davis, 38, who was with her children, 9-year-old Quanma Hillard and 8-year-old Deandrea Hillard.

Then, in a respectful tone she said: "We're here every day, so it doesn't matter who's here. We're here every day."

Braden doesn't mind. He hasn't helped feed those in need on Thanksgiving eve the past four years for notoriety or publicity. The 28-year-old Stagg High graduate and Oakland Athletics

pitcher, who on May 9, 2010, threw the 19th perfect game in major league history, does what he can because he can. He grew out of humbling beginnings and because he's earned some success, he feels compelled to help those who are less fortunate.

Again, with an outpouring of support from the community, Braden was able to provide more than 600 hot meals to men, women and children in need of a helping hand on Wednesday.

Braden said he had to turn away local merchants and restaurants who wanted to help because he had more than enough food for the lunch crowd. He hopes his efforts bring year-round attention to the growing need for services in this area, which has had many sectors decimated by the economy.

"It's just fun," Braden said. "It brings us together, too. I'm thankful for the opportunity and ability to do this."

Braden and his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, have solicited and

accepted donations the past several weeks. They hauled a bounty to the dining hall on Wednesday that included 60 pizzas from Michael's Pizza, 800 pounds of riblets and 15 turkeys from Bottley's BBQ, 20 turkeys from Andy Prokop with the United Way of San Joaquin, eight trays each of chile Colorado and chile verde from Casa Flores, 35 trays of lasagna from the Pizza Factory, 30 trays each of stuffing and mashed potatoes from Whirlow's, and 30 plaques of Arizona brand iced tea from Gaine's Liquors. Braden matched all of the donations.

"What I like about the whole thing is we have food from all over," Braden said. "The whole idea is why not give them, especially the kids, some choices one day a year. They can have all they want. That's the idea for me."

Edward Figueroa, chief executive officer of St. Mary's Interfaith Community Servies, which also provides clothing, shelter and education, said he sees more and more families and single mothers with children at the facility. St. Mary's is on pace to serve 400,000 meals this year.

"We have a lot of individuals in dire financial hardship," Figueroa said. "We're happy to provide some of life's basic necessities to those in need."


Low Back, a 54-year-old construction and maintenance worker, was wearing a nice pair of used dress shoes he picked up on Wednesday at the St. Mary's campus. Back hadn't heard of Braden, either, but he was grateful the Stockton resident helped provide his lunch.

"I'm thankful I'm here and that I have my health," Back said. "There are a lot more people in need than there used to be."

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