



Oxnard's NFL mom tackles hunger

Colbert's efforts locally are part of group's nationwide campaign

By José L. Sánchez Jr.

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

Berma Colbert of Oxnard, the mother of Keary Colbert of the Denver Broncos, will be working with other National Football League moms around the nation to tackle hunger.

"Obviously hunger is a great cause," Berma Colbert said. "I will be working with various people around the county to set up food drives."

Colbert said she does not consider herself a celebrity but is hoping the public's familiarity with her son, a wide receiver and graduate of Hueneme High School, will help her accomplish her task.

She works full time so pulling together the campaign will be a challenge, she said. "But I'm competitive, just like my son."

Colbert said her son likes to help people in need and is excited about what she is doing. He may pitch in by doing a signing to attract publicity for the cause when he comes home in October.

When he heard this year that an after-school program for children in Oxnard and Port Hueneme needed help, he donated \$65,000, his mother said.

The hunger campaign is a joint effort by the Professional Football Players Mothers' Association, the Campbell's Chunky/NFL Tackling Hunger program, and Feeding America, a national organization that includes FOOD Share, Ventura County's regional food bank.

Colbert was recruited this year to join the mothers association. When she was approached about the hunger campaign, her response was, "Yeah, I want to do this."

Starting this month, which is Hunger Action Month, Colbert and 33 other NFL moms will each get 500 cans of Campbell's Chunky soup to kick-start the food drives.

At the end of the season, the three moms who generate the most donations for their local food banks will receive trips to Tampa during the week of Super Bowl XLIII. There, they will take part in announcing the donation of 1 million cans of Campbell's soup to Feeding America food banks nationwide.

High profile aids the cause

Locally, the help could not be coming at a better time.

"For us to have the NFL and Keary's mom trying to help us with our mission of preventing hunger is wonderful," said Lance Ferguson, who supervises food drives for Oxnard-based FOOD Share.

In addition to the low-income people who have always made up the bulk of its clientele, FOOD Share also has been helping a growing number of families with annual incomes of \$35,000 to \$65,000 because of the worsening economy, he said.

Jump in requests seen

Requests for food began to increase two years ago and rose significantly 10 months ago, Ferguson said. At the same time, "it has been getting more difficult to get grants and donations, because all kinds of charities are trying to meet greater needs," he said.

FOOD Share provides food to 38,000 people every month and distributes 7 million to 9 million pounds of food every year, said Fran McNeill, the nonprofit's interim CEO.

Although requests for food have increased by 8 percent over the past 12 months, donations for the 12-month period that ended in June were down by 9 percent compared with the previous 12 months, said Jayson Muelder, FOOD Share's operations manager. During the same period, because the quality of donations declined, the agency experienced a cost increase of 50 percent, he said.

Helping to lead the national campaign will be Wilma McNabb, mother of Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb.

Wilma McNabb became famous through her "Mama's Boys" television ads in which she played a den mother who kept football players from eating junk food on the road and fed them Campbell's Chunky soup instead.

Berma Colbert can be reached at patecj@aol.com.



© 2008 Ventura County Star