

TAVERNIER

Church steps in to help Florida City kids

BY STEVE GIBBS
Free Press Staff

TAVERNIER — A Tavernier church congregation has come to the aid of a Florida City church that was recently torched by an arsonist.

Burton Memorial United Methodist Church at mile marker 93, oceanside, answered the call when they learned that Branches United Methodist Church needed help feeding scores of children.

The Florida City church's summer program looks after and feeds many of the area's

children while their parents work. When their church was destroyed a few weeks ago, they lost their kitchen and ability to look after as many as 100 children at a time.

Burton pastor Kerry Foote and several church members spent last week at the Florida City Elementary School building — Branches' temporary home — serving a hot breakfast and lunch to underprivileged children who participate in the summer program.

"These kids are so skinny, they ate and ate," said "BBQ" Bob Blevins, a Burton parish-

ioner who brought up his mobile kitchen and cooked for the children.

Blevins said one little girl ate until she got sick and then ate some more.

"These are kids who never get hot breakfast," he said. "The little kids especially loved the breakfast sausage."

Blevins left his Key Largo home every day last week at 4 a.m. to set up for a 9 a.m. breakfast and a noon lunch.

"I called Homestead Gas and they donated eight 40-pound tanks to fuel the generators and all the cooking equipment," he said.

Foote singled out Blevins for praise, calling him a godsend. He also cited those who provided funding for the food.

"If it wasn't for our volunteers adding the person power and the Ocean Reef Foundation and the United Way footing the bill, this could not have happened," Foote said. "BBQ Bob cooked and we all served. Even [Monroe County Mayor] Sylvia Murphy came up to serve on Wednesday and Friday."

Murphy is a member of the Burton congregation.

"They were all very thankful, especially the adults,"

Foote said. "They were all getting tired of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches."

Yuri Mikolay, Ocean Reef Foundation administrator, said her group recently started supporting food banks.

"When the economy went bad, we felt like we needed to support those basic needs," she said.

Burton spent about \$1,600 on the effort.

"This is what a church is all about," said Foote. "If we're not actively serving the community, we're not fulfilling the mandate of Christ."

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Above, thankful children gather for a photo outside BBQ Bob Blevin's mobile food kitchen flying the Burton United Methodist Church banner. The church and several volunteers provided food to a Florida City children's program last week after a fire shut down their regular summer food program location. Left, Burton volunteers shuck corn in preparation for a meal last week.

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