



Mark Wheeler, who lives near and goes to the monastery often, gets down to business with a tree limb.



Father Prior Philip Anderson leads a blessing before the workers sit down to a lunch that included a pig roasted on the site.

“The monks appreciate your help more than you will ever see them express. They are always amazed at what the work day workers accomplish. They are always surprised that we all keep coming back.”

- Dan Doyle

A year of work in a day

Volunteers converge on Clear Creek to assist with storm cleanup

Stories and photos by CHRIS BOULDIN

HULBERT - With the cold of winter gone and a crisp spring breeze in the air, more than 175 volunteers came together March 10 to assist the Benedictine monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery near Hulbert.

The effort, which was organized by Dan Doyle, assisted the monks with a number of construction and maintenance duties on their 1,050-acre ranch where they are building a monastery near Hulbert.

Father Prior Philip Anderson said that the monks appreciate the support of the volunteers, who have staged the work day for the past five years.

“We are grateful for the help that the volunteers provide. I truly believe the effort is part of the grace that is manifested by the monastic life,” he said.

“The workers will do in a day what it takes our monks more than a year to do.”

Mr. Doyle, a member of Christ the King Parish, said he spent almost two weeks soliciting donations and organizing talented men and boys for the fifth annual work day.

He cited the efforts and donations of Ray Schindler, Ron Snow and the Patterson family, who provided lunch in the form of a pit-roasted pig, as well as Mark Meador for the donation of commemorative T-shirts that read “WORK LIKE A DOG, EAT, LIKE, A HOG.”

Mr. Doyle also noted the donation of 400 biscuits and 500 pies from Tim Lutz of Bama Pie and the help of Connie Sullivan of Bishop Kelley High School, who publicized and organized the school’s workday presence.

He appreciated the presence of the Saint Francis Life Flight, a helicopter ambulance service, which arrived at lunch and was based out of the monastery grounds in the afternoon.

“We have all these people running around, using chainsaws, doing manual labor,” he said. “Having the helicopter out here helps to promote safety.”



Brother Joseph-Marie, left, works with Leroy Wiesmann from St. Pius X Parish.

Fortunately, the helicopter sat idle.

Mr. Doyle credited the prayers of the monks in playing a large part in the 70-degree weather the workers enjoyed.

“We had rain yesterday, and it is supposed to rain tomorrow, but the weather today is perfect,” he said. “I asked the monks to pray for good weather, so it looks like they have done their job.”

He also was pleased by the turnout of 175-plus volunteers.

“We have 20 miles of perimeter fence to clean, and we have 10 workers building five steel sheds for the monks, so we could have used more. But I am not disappointed in the turnout. I am thankful for everyone who came out to help.”

The volunteers included groups from Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Texas, as well as Minnesota and New Mexico.

The labor pool also included University of Oklahoma exchange students from France and South Korea. The Clear Creek monastery’s mother house is located in Fontgombault,

France, where since the 11th century it has carried out its mission of preserving the Gregorian Chant.

That is the primary focus of the monks’ lives at Clear Creek along with tending the agriculture and livestock that help them sustain their work.

The volunteer work crews joined the monks for all or part of their daily routine, which includes 6:40 a.m. Mass (attended by some volunteers who spent the previous night at Clear Creek) as well as 6 p.m. Vespers at the end of the work day.

Many men and boys slept over the night of March 10 so they could attend 10 a.m. High Mass the next morning.

At least one of the volunteers, Phil Sieve of Kansas City, was using the visit to further his discernment into the religious life.

“I came to Clear Creek for the first time about three years ago,” Mr. Sieve said. “I try to keep up with what is going on here.”

“When I saw all of the damage the ice storms caused this winter, I saw the weekend as an opportunity to come back and spend some time in the monastery. I love it here.”

Severe ice storms that hammered most of Oklahoma in January knocked out power at Clear Creek for about a week and a half, both at the monastery and at the convent of the Benedictine Oblate Sisters who also live there.

The Lenten work day is an annual event, and there always is plenty of work for the volunteers to take on, but this year they also lent their hands to clean up the damage inflicted by the winter blast.

In an email Mr. Doyle sent to Clear Creek volunteer workers and other supporters March 11, he reiterated his and the monks’ gratitude.

“The monks appreciate your help more than you will see them express. They are always amazed by what the work day workers accomplish. They are always surprised that we all keep coming back. They are also impressed by how many people come back during the year on their own initiative.”



Jordan Wiesmann, a parishioner of St. Bernard Church, accompanied his grandfather Leroy Wiesmann to lend a hand.



Paul Seaton, at far right, who came with his father Gary from their home in a suburb of Albuquerque, joins an early morning planning meeting.



Saint Francis Life Flight was on scene where men and boys were “running around using chainsaws,” but the helicopter fortunately was never called into duty.



Resting before returning to work are, from left, Matthew Dietz and Bill Hull of St. Pius X Church, 8-year-old Kolbe Costello and his father, Mark, who attend St. Michael Church in Bethany and live in Edmond