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## 5,000 fight hunger, one step at a time

**Charlotte's CROP Hunger Walk raises money to help meet needs here and around the world.**

By Stella M. Hopkins  
shopkins@charlotteobserver.com  
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Up to 5,000 people turned out Sunday for Charlotte's 31st CROP Hunger Walk, mindful of the economic crisis fueling needs locally and globally.

Organizer say the 3.7-mile walk is the largest of the nation's 2,000 CROP walks. It is sponsored by Church World Service, started more than 50 years ago to feed people in war-torn Europe.

This year's local leader, Anne Shoaf, expected to reach the \$250,000 fundraising goal, about \$20,000 more than last year. Since the Charlotte walk began in 1978, it has raised more than \$6 million. The total raised this year won't be tallied for a while as the group awaits online donations.

Shoaf and police on hand estimated the crowd at about 5,000, down from past years, which have reached double that. Shoaf said the decline was likely due at least in part to other high-profile group volunteer efforts this weekend.

"It's been such a difficult year for everybody," Shoaf said. "We're just thrilled to have this much excitement with neighbor helping neighbor."

About 75 percent of the money raised goes to help alleviate the hunger plaguing more than 1 billion people around the world and taking more lives than AIDS, malaria and TB combined. The other fourth of the money goes to three aid agencies in Charlotte, which has been especially hurt by the loss of banking jobs.

The Charlotte walk owes its size to its unusual nature, Shoaf said. The event is the only one not organized by one group, she said. Some walkers banded together behind signs announcing the church or school they represented, while others came on their own.

"We're all out here, united for the cause of raising money for... those in need of food," said Ward Misenheimer, pastor of Advent Lutheran Church, joined on the walk by daughter Ella, 7.

Young and old, families, power walkers and rollicking teens formed a wide procession through closed streets near the uptown financial district.

Walkers talked about the suffering of those nearby and of distant strangers, such as victims of the recent Indonesian earthquake and the two typhoons that just hit the Philippines. This year's CROP walk T-shirts said "We Walk Because They Walk," referring to distances people in other countries often walk for food and water.

"It'll bring awareness to what is happening, that everybody isn't as fortunate as we are," said Monja Johnson, an 11th-grader at Northwest School of the Arts and one of the teens carrying the march's lead banner.

Also at the front of the march were the honorary leaders, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools chief Peter Gorman and wife Sue, with daughter Katie.

"There are so many challenges facing our kids in the community in need, so many struggling," said Gorman, who sees the walk as a way to help develop youth leaders.

Charles and Beth Murray have come for about 20 years, him in a towering Uncle Sam hat and both sporting strings of bright Mardi Gras beads, which they give away along the route. The walk blends service and socializing.

"When you go to church, and you're sitting in the pew, you don't get to know the people sitting next to you," she said.

In Charlotte, CROP money helps support Crisis Assistance Ministry, Loaves & Fishes food pantries and the Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina. Like most nonprofits, they're feeling the twin pressures of a sustained downturn: People have less to give, and need more.

Area nonprofits have also suffered as United Way cut back following a \$15 million drop last year in the agency's annual campaign.

The steep decline came amid public outrage over a \$1.2 million pay package to former United Way President Gloria Pace King.

Quentin Cooper, 12, carried a foot-shaped sign shaped reading "Stomp out hunger."

"Raising this much money for people without food, it's pretty cool," he said.



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