

Ministry Tours Country to Fight Poverty, Bring Hope

As the economy continues to remain in a slump, the number of families who find themselves in poverty is at record-breaking heights. The Convoy Hope, an 18-year-old ministry that has served 1.6 million impoverished Americans, is working to help those in need.

The number of Americans living in poverty is at its highest level in 51 years with 17.4 million households reporting a struggle to put enough food on the table, according to the 2010 Census Bureau, and some 49.9 million Americans are without health insurance.

“In this economy there are so many new faces of poverty—people who never thought they would need help,” says Hal Donaldson, founder and president of the organization launching The Convoy of Hope, a 50-state tour uniting communities to provide local, lasting solutions to neighbors in need.

Launching May 12 in Dallas, this unprecedented \$50 million, two-year tour is uniting local businesses, nonprofits, churches, medical communities and government agencies to provide a “poverty-free” day to neighbors battling long-time or first-time poverty.

At each stop, The Convoy will provide an average \$1 million of goods and services in a single day to people in poverty. Unique to this effort is the neighbors-helping-neighbors approach to providing immediate and long-term, community solutions to poverty that will last long after The Convoy trucks roll onto the next city.

“Most people come for the food, but we know that poverty impacts every facet of life,” says Donaldson, who himself grew up poor after a family tragedy. “That’s why we work with

communities up to a year in advance of an outreach event to offer job, housing and medical assistance, clothing, hair cuts, family portraits and even a carnival for the children. We treat those in need as 'honored guests' in a festive atmosphere of hope."

Tony Haynes, whose family of five was living in their car after he lost his construction job, said he came to the Roswell, Ga., Convoy of Hope event in 2010 for the free groceries, but left with a new job, help toward finding a home and new ties to his community.

"They didn't just stop after that day," Haynes says. "The community groups followed up with me to help us meet our needs." Last year, the Haynes family returned to Roswell's Convoy of Hope community outreach event, but this time, as volunteers.

Organizers of the tour predict that on-site medical services, including dental and breast cancer screenings in select cities, will be among the most critical services provided with one-sixth of the U.S. population uninsured.

"Uninsured women in America are at greater risk of dying from breast cancer because they don't have access to early detection services," stated National Breast Cancer Foundation Founder and CEO Janelle Hail.

"The Convoy of Hope and National Breast Cancer Foundation will reach these women on their doorstep and offer them the life-saving resources they need to detect breast cancer early," Hail explains. "Our collaboration with Convoy of Hope is one of the most significant partnerships to take place in the fight against breast cancer." Some 70 percent of the "honored guests" who participate in Convoy events are women.

"The Convoy of Hope is onto something special here," notes former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee. "We all know there is no quick fix to poverty, so Convoy of Hope's strategy of uniting

neighbors to rally resources is smart, compassionate and has been proven effective over their past 18 years of work.”

Anne Beiler, founder of Auntie Anne’s Pretzel Company comments: “With no single solution to today’s tough economy, Convoy of Hope helps establish local, sustainable solutions that help create paths out of poverty for many.”