

'CANstruction' Ends Feds Feeds Families

By Daniela Vestal, Fort Bliss Public Affairs

The 2013 Feds Feeds Families food drive culminated with a "CANstruction" contest and an awards ceremony at the Fort Bliss Trading Post, Aug. 29.

The annual two-month long food drive began five years ago as a way to give a boost to local food banks during the summer months when cupboards historically get depleted. With most schools out for the summer, this dearth is a double whammy for children who rely on nutritious school lunches.



Army Community Service's "CANstruction" was titled "Flying the Flag – Waving out Hunger." Photos by Daniela Vestal, Fort Bliss Public Affairs.

This year, Fort Bliss set a goal of 10,000 pounds of food. Units and organizations from across the installation pitched in.

"This year we achieved about 400 percent of our goal," said Maj. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland, 1st Armored Division and Fort Bliss commanding general. "Close to 40,000 pounds (of food); which is unbelievably remarkable."

Even more significant is that more than half of the food collected came from a battalion with fewer than 400 Soldiers.

Lead by Chaplain (Capt.) Jasmine Johnson, battalion chaplain, the Soldiers of the 5th Battalion, 52nd Air and Missile Defense, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, gathered more than 23,000 lbs. of food and swept the awards for the drive and "CANstruction" contest.



The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, competed in the "CANstruction" contest with their entry, War Against Hunger.

Johnson said the unit is very involved with the community and this food drive was a way for the Soldiers to contribute to those they are familiar with.

"We work with the YWCA as well as the Hope Institute and the YMCA and the Salvation Army," Johnson said. "So we constantly see veterans as well as families who are in need. We see the faces that come through those different organizations."

Johnson said the unit's original goal was to gather 5,552 cans. After that benchmark was

quickly met, the goal then increased to 5,552 lbs. of non-perishable food.

Between the excitement of the Soldier's giving and the involvement of every level of the unit's leadership, that goal was quickly surpassed.

"The Soldiers were coming and telling me the pounds of food that they had," Johnson said. "They had trunks full of canned goods and they were really excited. Then you had squad leaders, platoon sergeants, first sergeants and commanders matching what the Soldiers brought in. We knew we weren't going to feed just one family – we were going to feed as many families as possible."

Johnson felt there was an added dimension to donating actual food items as opposed to money.

"When (we) are able to donate food, it goes directly to the organization that needs the food," Johnson said. "When it comes to just donating money you don't really feel as connected. (When you donate food you think) this canned good is actually going to be put on somebody's table – that's somebody's meal."