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## Meet the Bears

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LINDENHURST -- Nothing can stand in the way of holiday charity -- not a rush-hour snowstorm, nor even a ruptured biceps tendon.

And so it was Tuesday that Chicago Bears fans plowed through an ongoing storm to Lake Forest Hospital's Lindenhurst Health & Fitness Center to be greeted by defensive tackle Dusty Dvoracek, who gamely signed autographs with a right arm that suffered the aforementioned injury three weeks ago against the Vikings.

Dvoracek was joined by teammate Tommie Harris, no doubt fighting his own aches and pains less than 24 hours after his four solo tackles helped the Bears beat the Packers in 2-degree temperatures.

Watching the line of fans in front of her husband in the center's gymnasium, Lacy Dvoracek claimed to have the easy part.

"My job was to get the guys here," she said. "This is the first time I've ever done (an event) like this, and it's going really well."

But everyone involved in the event credited Lacy Dvoracek with being the driving force behind an effort to stock the Lake Villa Township Food Pantry through the holidays and beyond.

"Dusty's wife works at Lake Forest Hospital, so she actually recommended us to the Bears for a fundraiser," said the center's executive director, Eric Nelson. "We definitely want to lend a hand whenever we can ... With the snowstorm and everything, we're amazed at the turnout."

The unofficial count 45 minutes into the scheduled three-hour event was 120 parents signing waivers for their kids to complete an obstacle course and then meet the Bears. The only payment required was three items of non-perishable food for the pantry.

"We started out with three big boxes, and by the first half hour, they were filled," said center staff member Chris Bellson, who helped shepherd families through the process.

Lining up fresh boxes and preparing to load them for the trip to the pantry, Lake Villa Township Supervisor Dan Venturi thanked the Dvoraceks for their help during a tough time for social service agencies.

"Our demand has been probably triple what it normally is, and our supply is doing pretty good," Venturi said. "We've had a lot of unexpected food drives, and something like this is a

shot in the arm ... We can re-stock the shelves, because sometimes they're full on a Monday and empty by Friday."

Venturi added that the Lake Villa pantry was able to put together 75 Thanksgiving food packages for needy families, and aided by Tuesday's donations, the plan is to provide 120 packages for Christmas.

Lacy Dvoracek said providing a boost is exactly what she, her husband and Harris had in mind.

"I'm a labor and delivery nurse at Lake Forest, and one of my co-workers, Kris Austin, was talking about how a lot of the food pantries are hurting because of the economy," she said. "So basically I said let me try to get the guys together and help get some (donations) ... Tommie mentioned to me that he wanted to do something this Christmas to help out, so we asked him to come along."

The results for 5-year-old Amber Carson of Antioch and her 4-year-old brother Donny were autographed hats to wear for Christmas. As they walked away from the signing table, they eyed the fitness challenge spread out on the other side of the gym.

"Do you want to do the obstacle course?" said their mom, Tammy. When they nodded yes, she realized that the kids were wearing the boots required by the snowstorm.

"OK, let's go out to the car and get your gym shoes on," she said, in another example of wintertime determination.

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