

Proceeds from hike to assist the homeless

St. Joseph the Worker helps needy find jobs

By Joe Golfen

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As the economy weakens, the number of people in need of work goes up. You can help today at the 11th annual Hike for the Homeless at Estrella Mountain Regional Park in Goodyear.

The hike benefits St. Joseph the Worker, a non-profit organization that has been finding jobs for the Valley's homeless for more than two decades. Special events coordinator Blue Swadener said the need to help the homeless and jobless is greater this year than she has seen in a long time.

"The hike gives people a chance to help out their community while having a wonderful time exploring a beautiful part of the Valley," Swadener said.

The fundraiser started as a 50-person walk down Central Avenue in 1998, but Swadener says the event eventually outgrew that venue, and the hike now brings about 1,000 people to the Southwest Valley park.

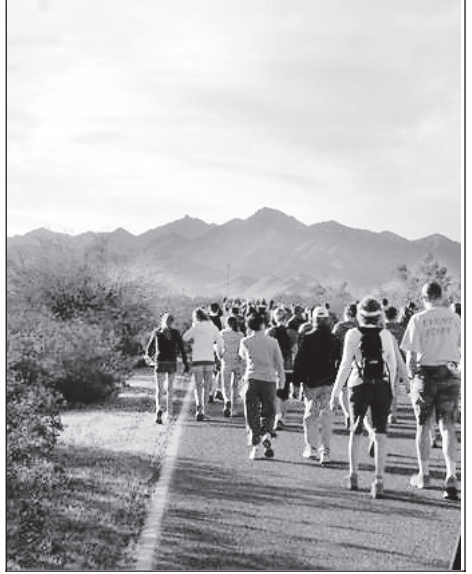
Hikers can choose a leisurely half-mile walk and 2-mile moderate hike starting at 9 a.m., or a 6-mile trail for experienced hikers at 7:30 a.m. Hikers can unwind afterward with breakfast burritos provided by Buckeye-based Hickman Farms and enter to win raffle prizes ranging from sports tickets to spa treatments.

According to Swadener, some people never hit the trails but come to check out the face-painting, hiking booths and other exhibits set up at the trailhead.

Registration for the hike is \$25 per hiker and \$15 for students on the morning of the event.

Participants can contribute as much money as they want to the charity, and a special raffle of REI camping gear will be held for those who donate more than the minimum.

"The hike is great because it's an example of the power of a lot of people giving a little bit, and it really does make difference," said Amy Caffarello, executive director of St. Joseph the Worker. "We rely so much on everybody doing their part, and we're very grateful to the community for all their support."



ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER

Last year's Hike for the Homeless will be repeated today at Estrella Mountain Regional Park.

Hike for the Homeless

When: Today, 7:30 a.m. (6-mile hike) and 9 a.m. (1/2-mile and 2-mile hikes).

Where: Estrella Mountain Regional Park, Ramada 5, 14805 W. Vineyard Ave., Goodyear.

Admission: \$25, \$15 for students.

Details: 602-417-9854, hikeforthehomeless.org.

A number of the organization's clients will be at the hike to speak about their experiences with St. Joseph the Worker, which played a role in helping them off the streets and into full-time employment.

"No one is better qualified to talk about the agency than the people who have been helped by it," Swadener said. "It's great that they want to share their experiences because it really gives people a sense of who they're helping and what the day is really all about."