

ROTARY HELPS



MARICELA RODRIGUEZ/VALLEY MORNING STAR

The Harlingen Neighborhood Food Bank was one of the community nonprofits selected by the Sunburst Rotary Club to receive financial help during the COVID-19 economic fallout. Pictured from left to right are Wende Coffman, Robert Serna, Cindy England, Jeff Lyssy, Yvette Salinas, Juan Salinas, and Jim Coffman.

Sunburst Club targets funds for local nonprofits in need

By RICK KELLEY
Staff Writer

HARLINGEN — As the fallout from COVID-19 continues, the needs of community nonprofits stressed by a lack of their usual funding sources is becoming acute.

To help counter it, the Harlingen Sunburst Rotary Club has identified a number of worthy local organizations

for financial help to weather the viral storm.

“These are groups that maybe don’t get a lot of publicity yet are trying to do good in the community,” Sunburst President John Hand said Wednesday. “We’re not talking about millions of dollars, we’re talking about relatively small contributions, a way of just trying to show support as best we

can.”

Sunburst Rotary has stepped in to aid La Posada Providencia in San Benito, the Rio Grande State Center, Culture of Life Ministries, Walgreen’s Red Nose fundraiser for children and the Harlingen Neighborhood Food Pantry.

Sunburst Rotarians, using a special coronavirus grant from its district Rotary orga-

nization, is helping La Posada pay its utility bills. The other groups are being funded out of the Sunburst Rotary’s own accounts.

“Red Nose is dedicated to helping poor children, especially in the United States,” Hand said. “And this COVID hits really, really hard, as you know.”

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At Culture of Life Ministries, headed by Dr. Stephen Robinson, the nonprofit provides free medical care for the poor and Hand said it was particularly stressed in responding to additional needs created by COVID-19.

“One of our members developed a real relationship with the Culture of Life, and given the fact that the virus has probably sent him a lot more cases than he’s had before, we thought we’d try to help him a little bit if we could,” Hand said.

At the Rio Grande State Center, which treats psychiatric disorders, Hand said Sunburst Rotary has been able to help in areas not covered by state funding, specifically help in setting up an isolation



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area for patients who may have been exposed to COVID-19. “They can’t keep them in the units because of the proximity,” he said.

“What we’re trying to do is provide them some amenities for that setup. We’re working on trying to set up some kind of a TV computer system there for people who might be isolated for several days or a week or even two weeks.”

At the Harlingen Neighborhood Food Pantry run by Jim and Wendy Coffman, Hand said Rotarians learned in a virtual meeting with the Coffmans just how hard COVID-19 was hitting the Rio Grande Valley.

“A year ago we were able to purchase a cooler for them, and we haven’t been able to do much since,” Hand said. “They did a virtual meeting speaking about the food pantry and it’s obvious they can use anything they get, because the demand for them has

doubled in the last three months.”

Sunburst Rotary Club itself hasn’t been spared by fallout from COVID-19, either.

“Speaking of our own nonprofit, it’s going to take us a long time,” he said. “We have lost essentially two major fundraisers this year. We’re trying to spend our money judiciously, what we have, and we’re not supporting as many groups as much as we have in the past.

“If you ask me how long it will take, your guess is as good as mine,” he continued. “My guess is that most of these places are going to take a couple years, including us, to get back to where we can put a budget together and expect that budget to work for us.”

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