



Image courtesy of Michael Johnson

## Dane County residents donate 30,000 pounds of drinking water to Flint, Michigan

Dane County Boys and Girls Club volunteers handed out water door-to-door in community with contaminated water supply



by **MATTHEW SHELVER** · Jan 26, 2016

The Dane County Boys and Girls Club distributed roughly 30,000 pounds of donated drinking water to the people of Flint, Michigan Monday.

The water was collected from more than 200 Dane County donors and the organization also raised \$1,500 in private donations, which it gave to the Flint chapter of Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

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Michael Johnson, Dane County Boys and Girls Club CEO, said the trip to Flint was one of the most fulfilling mission trips he had ever been on with the organization.

“The City Council gave us a proclamation thanking our city, the Boys and Girls Club and our volunteers for their efforts,” Johnson said. “We went door to door giving people bottles of water, gallons of water, and it was just amazing.”

Johnson said the donated water was collected Jan. 21-23 and transported to Flint using four semi-tractor trailers.

Johnson described the sad state of affairs volunteers witnessed upon arriving in Flint. Some Flint residents had been walking miles each day to find drinkable water, and others had been experiencing the effects of the lead-tainted water firsthand, he said.

“People told us their dogs’ skin was literally falling off because of the contaminated water,” Johnson said.

The contamination of Flint’s water supply occurred after the city chose to switch its primary water source from Detroit’s water supply to the local Flint River, Katherine McMahon, University of Wisconsin professor of civil and environmental engineering, said.

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Water from the Flint River isn’t innately poisonous, but it does tend to corrode older plumbing due to its chemical makeup, McMahon said. Flint River water corroded the city’s antiquated pipes, causing a dangerous amount of lead to seep into the city’s water supply, she said.

“The failure of someone to realize the chemistry of the water caused this problem with lead coming out of the pipes,” McMahon said.

There is abundant scientific evidence that ingestion of lead causes decreases in IQ, developmental problems in children and other serious health problems, McMahon said.

The level of lead concentration at which health problems typically begin to occur is 10 micrograms per liter; McMahon said the lead concentration of the tap water in Flint is generally 10 to 100 times higher than this threshold.

In some measurements taken by researchers from Virginia Tech, Flint tap water had a lead concentration up to 1,000 times higher than the threshold, McMahon said.

Reflecting on the Dane County Boys and Girls Club’s mission to Flint, Johnson said everyone has a responsibility to look out for one another.

“We have a moral obligation to help our brothers and sisters when they’re in need, and that’s what this mission was all about,” Johnson said.

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