

Strong turnout for DART Exercise

Over 5,000 lbs. of food given to area food banks

PORT HADLOCK—More than 50 local volunteers and 25 pilots gave of their time on Saturday, Sept. 21 in Jefferson County's first Disaster Airlift Response Team (DART) exercise at the Jefferson County Airport. The volunteers included multiple Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members and HAM operators from the local Volunteer Emergency Communicators (VECOM) team.

"The turnout for this exercise was everything we had hoped for and the weather favored us," said Laura Guth, Aviation Coordinator for the Jefferson County Department of Emergency Management.

At the beginning of the day, Guth instructed the volunteers about safely working around airplanes and keeping track of the donated food. The volunteers were divided into six teams who helped unload the food and household necessities.

All donated items from Kitsap and Clallam counties, Walla Walla, Anacortes and Bellingham were provided by food drives that took place in the participating counties and cities.

The first of 29 flights landed at 11:00AM. "At one time, we had six planes coming in, one after the other," Guth said. "Our volunteer scribes led by Sheila Hunt-Witte, certainly had their work cut out for them."

Michael Langenbach, President of the Jefferson County Food Bank Association, arranged to have the food delivered to the county's food banks in Brinnon, Quilcene, Tri-Area and Port Townsend.

Patrick Wright, Aviation Planning Specialist with the Washington State Department of Transportation made the trip to Jefferson County to observe the exercise. Also, Paul Marshall, originator for the Disaster Airlift Response Team on the West Coast flew up from California for the exercise.

The Disaster Airlift Response Team (DART) is made up of General Aviation pilots who volunteer their time and aircraft to aid in the event of an emergency. The DART pilots train to respond after major earthquakes and other disasters to bring in food, medical and other supplies to areas impacted by catastrophic events when state & federal resources are not available.

DART organizations have been active over the past couple of years flying in relief during major disasters including Hurricanes Florence and Harvey, and the Paradise Wildfire. DART aircraft are assisting in the recovery of the Bahamas from Hurricane Dorian, flying in over 500,000 lbs. of supplies so far. Volunteer ground teams are trained in Airport Community Emergency Response Team (ACERT) principles to work with the DART pilots. ACERT volunteers train to work safely around both ground-based aircraft and seaplanes to load and unload the supplies and personnel.