Blood center assists inaugural efforts

By Austin Ramsey Messenger-Inquirer

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

After a particularly successful drive in Ohio County last week, a federal donation aggregate has called on the Western Kentucky Regional Blood Center in Owensboro to help supply components for Inauguration Day in Washington D.C.

Upward of a million people are expected to attend the swearing-in ceremony and inaugural parade Friday, Jan. 20 in the nation's capital, nearly doubling the inner-city population. That means hospitals and health providers in the region should be operating at near-capacity for most of the weekend, using hundreds of units of blood for life-saving treatments.

In order to meet the demand, Blood Centers of America called on the WKRBC on Tuesday to provide as many spare red cell components as possible.

"We just finished up an amazing blood drive at Beaver Dam Elementary School," said Vicki Ellis, director of donor resources and recruitment. "Someone with Blood Centers of America had heard about our success, so they called us and asked us if we could help."

That drive is one of the center's largest, Ellis said. In just three days, the staff assisted 631 donors and collected approximately 530 units of blood.

Don Williams was principal at Beaver Dam Elementary for 28 years, and he started the annual drive in 1994 as a way to engage children in the blood donation process by teaching them about the human body and its circulatory system. He retired seven years ago now, but his daughter Ginger Tichenor has replaced him as school principal and carried the torch he lit all those years ago.

"We challenge our students to recruit four donors each," she said. "It engages almost all of our students, but the community gets involved, too. I'll be out shopping and someone will come up to me and ask me when this year's blood drive is because they want to mark it on their calendar. All of Beaver Dam gets involved in this drive."

And for the students themselves, she said, it's built a new generation of donors.

"I'll see kids that I taught here out at the tables giving blood," she said. "We ingrain it in them that this is something they can do to benefit the community and now they’re grown up doing just that."

CEO Janet Howard said WKRBC shipped 60 red cell units of blood to Washington on Wednesday. The center serves six hospitals in a nine-county area of western Kentucky. Howard said she contacted all of them to ensure that their supply was substantial enough to take the donation.

She said last week's successful drive does not in any way diminish the local need. More local donors are always wanted. The center gave only what it could to supplement donations from other independent blood centers.

"Heaven forbid that anything happen in D.C. this weekend," she said. "But if it does, it's western Kentucky blood that's helping our whole nation."

Blood Centers of America, headquartered in Rhode Island, makes up 51 independent centers that include the WKRBC. Each center is strategically situated in the continental U.S. to meet unique blood demands and coordinate resources. BCA President Bill Block said Thursday that he wanted to thank western Kentucky for heading the call and aiding the nation's capital, should the need arise. He said blood centers that participate in the organization have helped save lives during the South American Zika virus outbreak and the Orlando (Florida) nightclub shooting, to name a few.

"We make sure the country has what it needs when it needs it," he said.

Austin Ramsey, 270-691-7302, aramsey@messenger-inquirer.com, Twitter: @austinrramsey