

CROP Hunger Walk celebrates 40 years

By **Lynsay Williams**
UNC Staff Writer

Durham celebrated 40 years of fighting hunger on April 6 with the Annual CROP Hunger Walk, one of the oldest organized walks in the country.

CROP Hunger Walks, sponsored by Church World Service and organized by communities across the country, aim to end hunger both locally and around the world. There are over 1,400 walks around the nation, and North Carolina holds the top three spots for the largest walks. Durham is third behind Greensboro and Charlotte.

“The Durham walk, and really North Carolina participation, leads the nation,” said John McCullough, president and CEO of Church World Service.

The day began with walkers and hunger-fighting organizations spreading out on the lawn of the Duke University Chapel. There is no fee to walk in the event, but T-shirts are sold for a minimum of \$3 as a fundraiser.

The walk started with the African American Dance Ensemble leading stretches and dancing at the front of the pack. The walk is about 4.8 miles, and the path runs through Duke University and the Walltown neighborhood in Durham.

Seventy-five percent of the proceeds go to global relief efforts, and the remaining 25 percent is used locally.

Church World Service values sustainability, and works to help communities solve long-term problems. The organization rarely gives only food unless there is a crisis situation or natural disaster. Instead, it provides individuals with knowledge to improve their communities.

“It’s about saying to someone, ‘I’m not better than you. We’re the same, and I have this information that can help you,’” said Krista Connelly, assistant field director for the Southeast region of Church World Service.

“There are a lot of groups that will go in and take some water or clothes or something in an emergency,” said Bob Newlin, who has been helping to organize the CROP Hunger Walk in Durham for more than 15 years. “But Church World Service is the one group that goes in and stays till things are back to normal.”



The African American Dance Ensemble dances through the crowd, leading the way for approximately 2,000 walkers in Durham’s 40th Annual CROP Hunger Walk on April 6. (Staff photo by Lynsay Williams)

Connelly said the focus on education and sustainability is what sets Church World Service apart from other organizations of its kind.

“The CROP Hunger Walk is considered the granddaddy of all walks,” she said. “It started as a grassroots effort in response to World War II.”

The Durham walk was started in 1975 by two divinity students at Duke University. The money from the first walk was used to start Meals on Wheels, a meal delivery service for housebound individuals, in Durham in 1982.

Forty years later, the walk included nearly 2,000 participants as well as various churches, sponsors and other organizations.

Newlin said there’s a lot that goes into planning a walk this size. A com-

mittee of about 20 people meets monthly to plan the walk. Arrangements have to be made as far in advance as possible, which means the committee has already set a date for next year’s walk.

“It was probably as well organized as it’s been in two or three years,” he said.

Eric Olson-Getty, who has previously participated in the event, said he likes the walk because it puts money into local programs.

“I think it’s a really fabulous opportunity for people all over the community to get together and raise money for world hunger,” he said.

Although the final donation count for the walk is not yet completed, last year’s Durham CROP Hunger Walk raised \$139,508. This year, the walk has made \$42,523 so far in online donations.