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Local kids pinch 8.4 million pennies to set world record

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FONTANA - Don't tell cash-strapped lawmakers this, but Wednesday about 2,000 students from 67 schools across Southern California laid a chain of 8.4 million pennies on the race track at Auto Club Speedway.

The goal was to weave a chain 100-miles long and break the Guinness World Record held by the folks in Fort Scott, Kansas, who placed a 40-mile chain of pennies in July.

Twins Rebecca and Morgan Metts, 11, traveled with friends from Boulder Ridge Middle School in Sun City to help break the record.

"It would be very awesome," Rebecca said. "All of our friends would see us as more than friends. We would give them our autographs."

Called "Miles of Change," the penny drive was started in February by students, staff and volunteers involved with THINK Together, an after-school outreach that serves more than 35,000 low-income students at 200 locations across San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

The program is a tribute to President Barack Obama's campaign theme of hope and change, and a celebration of the bicentennial of President Abraham Lincoln's birth and the centennial of the Lincoln penny.

The kids collected a total of more than 14.6 million pennies. The money will go to the outreach.

Montgomery Goodermont, a 12-year-old from Rancho Cucamonga, joined the penny drive as a way to serve the community.

He and his mother found out about the outreach while surfing the Internet for volunteer opportunities.

"It's kind of cool because you're helping set a world record," Goodermont said. "And it's something to do."

While plenty were excited about setting the record, many were excited about seeing the Speedway.

"A lot of these kids have never been on a field trip before, so this is awesome for them," said Larry Tenney, a spokesman for THINK Together.

The roster of those who were there to validate the record for Guinness included Dave Allen, vice president of the Speedway, Chivas USA soccer player Gerson Mayen, Matt Mullins from the TV show "Kamen Rider: Dragon Knight," Michelle Babin of America's Next Top Model and representatives from Think Together.

Miles of Change is recognized by the official Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission established by Congress.