

Volunteers

October 2013

If we were to look at Whitfield County from a pure statistical description, we would see a community who recently had one of the highest unemployment rates in our nation. Seventy-two percent of the children enrolled in the county schools are considered economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced meals. This past summer a total of 228,727 free meals were served to children -another indication of the number of children in poverty. Many of these children walked or rode bikes to one of 54 locations in our county in order to take advantage of the free meals. If we looked at purely statistical information, Dalton might not be the shining star on the chart of best places to live. In fact, in an article about a year ago, the New York Times classified Dalton as being “desperate.” In the annual American Community Survey, released last month the U.S. Census Bureau releases statistics naming Dalton as the 10th poorest city in the nation. But, thankfully, communities are not made up of only things that can be expressed as a statistic.

As I visit our schools, I continue to be amazed by the generosity of this community. Every day countless people give so much of their time and resources to help meet the needs of others, especially the needs of our children in Whitfield County. This was especially evident to me this week when I watched the cooperation of volunteers from two counties and four school systems come together to conduct Teen Maze, an event that allowed every 10th-grader in Murray and Whitfield Counties to experience the consequences of life choices in a hands-on, realistic, and educational way. Business, industry, family support organizations and all area emergency agencies combined their resources and worked together tirelessly for five days in the heat because they knew that if they could keep one teen and his family from suffering the consequences of real-life events such as driving drunk then the result would be worth all of their efforts.

This was just one example of the giving nature of this community but it was one that caused me to stop and think about what can be accomplished when we all work together for our kids. It made me stop and appreciate this community and the students who benefit from the many hours and dollars that are given freely and willingly in order to provide our schools with not only the extras that our students deserve, but often times they provide the basics that our budget simply cannot supply.

You can visit any school in our system and see evidence of the work and money that is donated on a regular basis by businesses and community volunteers. Several of our schools have received much needed free carpet and installation. Faith-based and civic groups donate books, book bags and school supplies for students whose families struggle to buy these things. This summer our Career Academy received equipment and labor for painting and wiring a new Mechatronics lab from a local industry. This enables students to receive invaluable training that can lead to a good-paying job.

Many of the monetary donations that we receive are given with the request that the donor remain anonymous. The largest anonymous donation we have received was approximately one million dollars and at the request of the donor it is being used to replace the badly worn track and tennis courts at Southeast High School. Donated funds are used to assist students who cannot afford to participate in extended field trips, fund student incentive programs, purchase technology, purchase student instructional supplies, and fund beautification projects around our campuses.

Monetary donations are great, but equally important and equally appreciated, are the many hours of time that are donated to our schools. Every Friday, six of our elementary schools send Saturday sack lunches home with children in need. Various churches and civic organizations provide these sacks in order to provide for students over the weekend. Industry, churches, and civic organizations regularly send volunteers into our schools. The volunteers listen to children read, teach subjects such as economics and art, and serve as mentors and buddies for students with these special needs. Our campuses continue to be beneficiaries of many hours of time donated by volunteers who rake leaves, plant shrubs, and help build lovely gardens for our students to enjoy. These valuable volunteers vary in age and background but they all share one common characteristic – they want to make a difference in the lives of our children.

If we were to look at Whitfield County from a pure statistical description, we might miss two of the most important attributes of our community—the caring hearts of the people and their determination to do whatever it takes to prepare our children for a successful future. It is an exciting time to work in Whitfield County Schools and to see the different community groups and individuals working together with us to ensure that Whitfield County Schools continues the “Tradition of Excellence” that has long been our motto. When we work together, we can accomplish great things for our students and our community!