

The Learning Curve

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Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Howard Middle School Dedication

Overwhelming student success in first year celebrated



Howard Middle's award-winning chorus performs at the school's dedication.

"Let's give our students a round of applause," Howard Middle School Principal Dr. Janet Battcher said as she welcomed the community to the school's dedication.

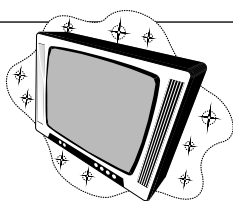
It's only been open a year, but already they have already made a name for themselves by excelling in both academics and sports. Many of their students won awards at the Technology Fair, the Academic Team won first place in the county, the Chorus is ranked one of the best in the state, both their girls' and boys soccer teams became county champions, the boys' baseball team had a successful season, and much more.

Speaking on their experiences, students spoke to the assembled crowd on some of their favorite memories and what it was like to be paving the way for future years. Many thanked their teachers for encouraging them to get involved and the Board of Education for giving them these opportunities. Both the band and strings had groups present to perform during the ceremony, and the chorus closed it all down with one of the songs that won them accolades this year.

"To get to this day has been wonderful," Bibb County School Board President Gary Bechtel said. "It's been worth all the effort."

"Look at what's been done in just one year," congratulated Keynote speaker and 13 WMAZ Anchor Frank Malloy. "That's the power of the public school system and why I'm so passionate about the public school system."

"It has been a great testimony to the teachers and administrators that Howard has done so well," added Superintendent Sharon Patterson. "A great beginning to a great school, and a good standard for Bibb County Public Schools."



For up-to-date information and events concerning Bibb County Public Schools, tune in to Cox Cable Channel 17!

Local churches come together to lend their support to two local elementary schools

Expanded program brings in more volunteers and materials donated by local businesses

"Love is an action verb; it's not a passive verb," says Reverend Bobby Thompson of the West Highland Church. "It's just words if we don't put the actions to match them."

West Highland has come together with Mabel White Baptist, The Link, St. Andrews Presbyterian, Tatnall Square Baptist, Emmanuel Church, Stemsonville Baptist, and Congregation Beth Yeshua to form CareFest, a group dedicated to helping out the community in any way they can. "We love Macon and the people in Macon," explains Thompson. "We just want to make a difference in the community."

Several years ago, he visited Little Rock, Arkansas to attend an event that is the basis for CareFest. Starting with just one church, it's called ShareFest, and now involves more than 100 churches. The year he attended, they worked in 22 different schools and raised more than \$250,000 to donate to other groups. Realizing all the good work being accomplished by a group of volunteers, he knew Macon could benefit from a similar program.

Three years ago, CareFest began as a one-day festival of music, games, and activities to begin raising money and community awareness. Last year, CareFest approached the Bibb County Public Schools and offered their services. A work day was held at Union Elementary, and more than 280 hours and several thousand dollars in materials were donated to help beautify the grounds.

The work day this year was expanded to include both Union and Morgan Elementary. At Union, Principal Effram Yarber's main request was to have mulch put down on the playground because the sand that currently padded it kept getting tracked throughout the school. At Morgan, volunteers planted trees, added mulch to the Pre-K playground, and tore down the old, unsafe portions of the larger playground.

"This year's event has grown so much," says

Thompson.

"This is amazing," agrees Link co-pastor Kenneth McMillan, looking around at all the parent and student volunteers.

"You know what we need?" asks Morgan Principal Diane Rodgers of the teachers and parents gathered at the front of the school. "A bird feeder right there," she answers, pointing to a spot back near some trees and bushes.

Rodgers' spirits are high, and she is swept up in the idea of future beautification projects. Besides the almost 60 volunteers working at the schools, several school parents and teachers are present to help out: passing out tools, food, water, and, most importantly, their thanks.

"They're thanking each volunteer personally, making sure they know they're appreciated," says Rodgers.

Not only will the grounds look better, the students will actually be safer when they return to school next year. Underbrush in the woods surrounding the school is being cleared, and, much to the delight of the faculty, the old playground is being torn down.

"The slide is gone?" exclaims 2nd grade teacher Lori Garrett when Rodgers updates them on the progress. Each year, it had to be roped off to keep students from using it. "It was just not safe."

"We want to bridge the gaps in Macon and make a difference," explains McMillan.

"People are looking for what they can do [to help the community]," adds Thompson.

So far, they have only done work in these two schools and raised money through their festival, but Thompson would like to see it grow to incorporate all aspects of the community. "We're a long way from [the extent of ShareFest], but in a few years, with the growth we've seen so far, we hope to surpass that."

This year, between Union and Morgan, more than 500 hours and close to \$5,000 in supplies and materials were donated.



Sand from Union Elementary's playground had to be removed before the mulch could be put down.



Volunteers dug holes for the trees to be planted in at Morgan Elementary.

Bibb County Public Schools honors its volunteers with awards breakfast

"Your volunteering has made a difference in the lives of our students," Superintendent Sharon Patterson told school volunteers as Bibb County honored their hard work for the 25th year. "We'd like to say thank you to all the volunteers in the Bibb County Public Schools."

Held in the Rutland Campus cafeteria, the volunteers were treated to breakfast, performances by the schools' musical ensembles, awards, and praise upon praise on how much they are appreciated. "You are such a powerful factor in public education," Patterson said.

This year's Top Volunteer of the Year went to Elaine Hall, President of Skyview's Parent-Teacher Organization, for donating 2,200 hours. Awards were also given to volunteers who had given 100 hours of their time, and 12 volunteers were honored for donating 1,000 or more hours.

The Ann Hicks Spirit Award recognizes outstanding overall school involvement in the spirit of volunteerism and was awarded to Howard Middle. In its first year, they had almost 300 volunteers donating more than 1,400 hours. The Red Apple Award, given to the school with



Heritage Elementary volunteers were awarded both the Red and Golden Apple Awards.

highest number of total hours, was awarded to Heritage Elementary for logging 33,424 hours from more than 700 volunteers. Heritage also

won the Golden Apple Award, which represents the most number of hours donated per student (total hours donated divided by number of students enrolled). There were 39.5 hours donated for every student at Heritage.

This being the 25th year of the program, organizers wanted it to be a banner year. Five billboards have been set up around the county thanking those who already spend so much time in the school and encouraging more to get involved. Despite having a record-breaking amount of hours last year, they hoped they could surpass it this year. With 15,669 volunteers, 206,386.75 hours were donated. Using minimum wage, that translates to \$1,062,891 worth of work.

"Without you, we wouldn't have some of the great things we have," Jeremy Pritchard of Wachovia Bank told them.

"It's a labor of love, which is truly priceless," said Patterson. "You provide an invaluable service to our students, teachers, and administrators. What a great 25 years this has been, and thank you for your continued commitment!"