

Youth Services Has Much to Celebrate Books for Katrina's Kids!

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Smyrna Public Library saw many evacuees seeking information through use of our Internet access. Within days of the hurricane, families were attempting to establish some level of permanence by placing children in schools. So, it was only the very young children of Louisiana and Mississippi that we began to see with their parents in the library.

Though the library is offering a temporary library card to hurricane victims, we thought it would be nice to provide a few paperback books, coloring books and crayons to these pre-school age children so that they would have a book in their hand while they were away from home. A simple, little project – or so we thought. We decided to use a gallon size zip-lock bag and put everything inside for ease in distribution. We set a goal of making 100 kids packs.

Word of our efforts spread and this simple idea turned into a major operation. It was wonderful to witness the generosity of city employees, our FOSL and library patrons. Once the seed was planted, this idea grew fast! The Mayor's Office stepped up to the plate and donated enough crayons and coloring books to fill more than 100 packs. When Jennifer Bennett from The City of Smyrna Community Relations heard about the packs, she delivered 300 adorable teddy bears. We raised our goal and decided to make 300 packs.

The Friends of Smyrna Library donated money to help us reach this new goal. Word traveled to the Smyrna Golden K (Kiwanis) members who hand delivered a donation of \$500 to make more kids packs. School groups, library patrons, and a local senior living center donated items. Optimist members brought books and supplies to the library. A local Girl Scout troop made more than 100 cards to include in the packs. We utilized the resources of MUST ministries to distribute to the families in shelters in Cobb County and delivered more than 300 activity packs.

But that wasn't the end! The endeavor continued to grow. Adult volunteers continued to work daily filling a total of 500 children's activity packs. Thanks to Jan and Ken Hildebrandt, city employees and parents at Bascomb Elementary in Cherokee County, we had a whole elementary school wanting to be a part of our project. The Bascomb families collected school supplies and books. We searched for a needy school and found Orange Grove Elementary School in Gulfport, Mississippi. The school was attempting to re-open on October 3rd with hundreds of extra students.

Immediately, we boxed up the remaining activity packs and all the school supplies. A local freightliner company gave us a very generous discount on shipping and once again the FOSL stepped up to the plate, paying the freightliner shipping costs for a full pallet of items! Ruth Hayden and I delivered the 20 large boxes of items to Southeastern Freightliners bound for Gulfport. The shipment left metro-Atlanta once roads were open and the shipping embargo was lifted. Our "little" project came to an end. No wonder Smyrna is such a great place to live and work. To quote song writer, Pat Terry, it is where "dreams and jonquils grow!"