

Community initiatives provide school supplies to more than 1,000 students

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Through the Back to School Bash and Bartow Give a Kid a Chance events on Saturday, about 1,200 students will be better equipped to tackle their first day of school. Both first-year initiatives, the communitywide programs plan to grow their offerings in the coming years.

"Our goal is for every year to get even bigger where we can provide more kids with school supplies," said Sheri Blalock, vice president of the Bartow County Social Club, a nonprofit that sponsored the Back

to School Bash. "Especially with this economy and people losing their jobs, every little bit helps. The need was definitely great because the backpacks were gone in less than 30 minutes. ... We were just overwhelmed and just overjoyed with the success of being able to give back even to 100 kids.

"That made a difference to some parents that have three and four children, trying to provide backpacks and school supplies for them to go back [to school]. So if we can just help with one notebook that's still a help to that particular family."

In addition to supplying about 100 children ages 5 to 18 with school supplies on a first-come, first-served basis, the Bartow County Social Club also treated the youths to lunch and games at Summer Hill Educational and Recreational Complex from 2 to 6 p.m.

Blalock said the distribution event ties in with the group's slogan: Bridging communities and supporting our children.

"Our overall mission is just to nurture the community and give back to the community," she said. "We've done things [like] providing toys at Christmas to needy families. We've also donated money to a family that didn't have enough to bury a child that was killed. So we just want to nurture the community and be able to give



back and provide outlets for the kids with different activities throughout the year that they can participate in."

Also on Saturday, more than 1,000 pre-K to 12th-grade students were assisted through the Bartow Give a Kid a Chance program. Pre-registered students received the free items and services -- backpacks filled with school supplies; jeans; T-shirts; haircuts; and dental, vision and hearing screenings -- at four distribution sites: Cartersville Civic Center, the Euharlee Commissary, Manning Mill Park in Adairsville and South Central Middle School in Emerson.

The outreach initiative was organized by Bartow Collaborative Family Connection, Tallatona Community Action Partnership, area churches, United Way of Bartow County and Georgia Department of Labor's Employer Committee.



"You remember your first day in school, don't you? How would you have felt if you couldn't have that new haircut, that new outfit and your supplies?" said Bartow Collaborative Executive Director Linda Walker, who was co-coordinating Bartow Give a Kid a Chance along with Terry Terrell of The Bridge United Methodist Church. "All kids need to go to school that first day looking good, feeling good and feeling

like they're equipped. That kind of helps set the stage, I think, in a very small way, of course, toward overall school success."

Due to the community's support of the program, Walker is encouraged they will be able to expand its offerings in the future.

"It was the first year we had done it on a scale this big and we knew it was a learning process," Walker said, adding area churches have individually provided school supplies to the community in the past. "We've learned a whole lot and I think we'll get a whole lot more support next year. I would like to see the numbers double or even more. I think our goal will be to assure no kid goes back to school without being equipped."

