



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -- July 14, 2015

Contact: Delia A. Taylor, APR, Taylor Media Services, 225-931-0286 or taylormedia@bellsouth.net; Krysta Watts at 225-241-1560; or Livingston Parish Assessor Jeff Taylor, 225-921-1554.

Livingston Assessor Begins 15th Year of Parish-Wide School Supply Drive

*Program Has Helped Thousands of School Children,
Some from Start to Finish*

LIVINGSTON, La. – When Livingston Parish Assessor Jeff Taylor and his team of volunteers collect donations for school supplies this year, they will do so knowing that their efforts have helped some Livingston Parish families successfully educate their children from start to finish.

That's because the program is now in its 15th year of providing needy children in Livingston Parish Public Schools, from pre-kindergarten ages to 12th grade, with the school materials and supplies they have needed to be successful in the classroom.

"It's hard to believe that we started this program 15 years ago. In many ways it seems like yesterday that my wife and I were sitting at our breakfast table with some of our teacher friends discussing the need in our schools and putting a plan of action together," said Livingston Parish Assessor Jeff Taylor.

Taylor said the program has grown from him first thinking, "Well, maybe we can help a couple hundred children, if we're lucky," to each year helping thousands of

children. The last few years, the program has benefitted around 2,500 students each year. “We actually think this year’s numbers may climb closer to 3,000 children because of the continued growth in our school system,” he said.

To meet that growing target, Taylor said the campaign has set a goal of collecting approximately \$50,000 in donations this year. In addition to the financial support from several local businesses and community organizations, **volunteers will be outside the Walker and Denham Springs Wal-Mart Stores on Aug. 1-2 and Aug. 8-9, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. each day, to accept monetary and in-kind donations.**

“Volunteers will be dressed in our bright Assess the Need shirts, so store visitors can easily identify them and give to our program. We also will have information available if anyone has questions,” he said.

He said donations also can also be mailed to P. O. Box 1802, Denham Springs, Louisiana, 70727, given on-line at www.AssesstheNeed.com, or dropped off at the Livingston Parish Assessor’s office in the Town of Livingston during regular work hours, 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

Taylor noted that the Assess the Need program is a registered charitable organization, and all donations are eligible for tax deductions.

“Every year, since the start of our campaign, the people of Livingston Parish have generously responded to our request for help. We are launching out in faith again this year believing that our parish will continue to partner with us to give our students the tools they need to be successful in the classroom,” Taylor said.

A History of Meeting the Need

Taylor said the Assess the Need program has collected well over half a million dollars in donations and supplies for Livingston Parish students over the past 14 years.

He noted that the program also activated an “emergency collection” in 2009 to help in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, resulting in nearly \$100,000 worth of additional donations and supplies.

“We received a call around Sept. 1, 2009, from the Livingston Parish School Superintendent asking us if we could ‘reactivate’ our program to help with the more than 1,000 students who had been displaced in Livingston Parish because of Hurricane Katrina, and we said ‘yes, we would do what we could,’” Taylor said. “Before we knew it, we started receiving donations from everywhere.”

“In fact, we received a call from a group in the Northeast that said they wanted to send some backpacks and supplies to us, and wanted to know where they could be delivered. We asked them to drop the supplies by our church in Denham Springs, and I would swing by later that day and bring them to our house. But then we got a call from our pastor telling us that an 18-wheeler was in front of the church with a full load of supplies, and that he didn’t have room for everything. We couldn’t believe it.”

Taylor said that by the time he and his volunteers gathered donations and supplies together, they were able to help 6,000 students who had lost everything due to the back-to-back storms of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

“We helped all the students who had evacuated or transplanted to Livingston Parish after Katrina, then we distributed supplies to Tangipahoa, St. Tammany, Plaquemines, Assumption, and Calcasieu parishes, as well as in Jasper, Texas, over the next month, helping the families in those areas that had been hit so hard by the storms,” Taylor said.

“The damage was so widespread and the need was so great,” he added. “I still remember the devastation that we saw in Plaquemines Parish. They told us that every school-aged child had been affected, as well as all the teachers and school administrators. When we pulled into the parking lot of the school board office with a truck load of supplies, the administrator and his staff cried and hugged us,” he said.

“Our program, thanks to the generosity and love of the people of Livingston parish, has been able to touch thousands of lives,” Taylor said.

Meeting the Need with Care and Love

Taylor noted that his program has never used an application process to determine who gets assistance. Rather, he said he has relied upon the knowledge and observations of school counselors and teachers to identify the needs at their respective schools.

“I don’t even know who gets supplies each year,” Taylor said. “We wanted our program to impact those most in need of the assistance, and we knew that our teachers – those who see the students day in and day out – would have the best information.”

So each year, the program coordinator works with school principals and counselors to determine which supplies and the quantity needed for their schools. Assess the Need volunteers are instructed to tell families who request help to contact their school principals or school counselors to make them aware of their need to ensure they get supplies for their children or grandchildren.

“We ask each school to count up those students who ‘don’t have,’ or whose families are struggling,” he said. “It may be that one family has always been fortunate enough to provide in the past, but because of an illness or recent unemployment that situation has changed. Those families would never be identified in an application process. They are identified by caring teachers and school personnel who talk to their students and know what’s going on.”

Taylor noted that many school counselors tell him that they discreetly call the children to the office or supply room to “shop” for their supplies. “They tell them that there are people in Livingston Parish who care for them and who want them to be successful, and that’s why they have provided these supplies for them to do well in school. The children get to pick and choose their supplies just like all the other kids.”

“At the end of the day, the child who came to school empty-handed now goes home with a new backpack and supplies. No fuss. No singling out. No embarrassment. I think this way has worked well,” he said.

More Efficient Over Time

Taylor said the campaign is able to purchase the thousands of notebooks, paper, scissors, glue, crayons, markers, construction paper, pencils, ink pens, rulers, pocket folders and book bags in bulk supply.

He said Volks Constructors donates the use of its large flatbed truck and crane each year to pick up the supplies from Wal-Mart, then deliver them to the Livingston Parish Literacy and Technology Center, where they are sorted and stacked according to each school's need.

"When we first started, we used my dad's church and had volunteers take the various supplies, organize them and stuff the bags. At one point, we had every pew filled," he said. "From there, we would have volunteers deliver the supplies to each school."

"We soon learned that was not the most efficient process, especially when our parish has 43 schools!" Taylor said.

Supplies are now sorted into stacks inside the Automotive Service Technology learning area at the parish's Literacy and Technology center, which is located near Walker. Each school sends someone to drive through the automotive area, and the supplies are loaded into their truck or car.

"What used to take us a week, can now be done in a day and a half," he said.

Taylor said the supplies will be sorted and made available for principals to pick up prior to the start of school on Aug. 7, enabling the teachers and counselors to distribute the supplies to students on the first day.

"It's important that our students begin the school year on a positive. Doing so can set the tone for their success for the rest of the year," Taylor said. "We want to send our children the message that each of them matter and we are investing in their success."

For more information, "like" Assess the Need on Facebook or visit www.AssessTheNeed.com.