

Project Unity aims to better community

By **KELLY BROWN**
Eagle Staff Writer

It might be easier for Jeannie Heller to explain what Project Unity doesn't do, rather than what it does every day.

It's not a do-nothing group that means well but never accomplishes much; it doesn't overlook a child's education, health or medical needs in Brazos County; it's not a small group helping a few people; and it won't wind up col-

lecting dust on a shelf — if Heller has her say. And she will.

In fact, an effort she helped start will be heard Saturday as more than 100 people — including Texas A&M University officials, leaders with the cities of Bryan and College Station, those from the religious and business sectors, educators, law enforcement and interested residents — will get into buses and take a look at some of the poverty-stricken areas in Brazos County, which

has a 27 percent poverty rate.

But don't talk to Heller about statistics. "When I hear those stats, I think about the children behind the number," she said. "There's real people out there who don't want to be a part of that number but, because of circumstances, they are. We're here to help them get out."

During the four-hour Community Plunge program, the buses will stop for presentations by "tour guides," who will explain what's being done in the area and pose questions about what still needs to be accomplished.

"Community Plunge is the first step in making some significant changes in our community," Heller said. "We all, even those who work closely in these areas, don't even get a pulse of what's going on out here. Neighborhoods are pulling together, and that's what needs to happen."

An invitation to decision-makers from A&M's president Ray Bowen says that, though the community enjoys a safe environment filled with education, he knows

Bryan, where Project Unity headquarters, and the Learning Center in College Station. The center also will stop at locations being visited by the program, including from Aggies involved in service-oriented Big Event projects.

Heller mapped out the route with fellow Project member Josie Peacher, pointing out that Community Plunge is not just "show and tell." "The potential for the program here is enormous when you consider that all these folks — for the first time — will be able to get a good look at what the change once they know the problem is," said Peacher. "It runs the Brazos Food Bank year, it supplied 38,000 pounds of food to the needy."

"I believe in the hurt and that, once you see you act, changes will follow," Heller, whose program has six chosen earlier this year, 135 communities across the state try for the way it has been exemplary local organizations for children and youth. Those who take the program Saturday will meet with

Project Unity honored

Bryan program 1 of 6 national winners

By **KELLY BROWN**
Eagle Staff Writer

A Bryan program built to pull the community together and help families in need has won a national award for its excellence in mobilizing people to make a difference.

Project Unity was chosen this week as one of six national winners from a pool of 135 communities across the country. The Brazos County program was the only one selected in Texas for developing exemplary local collaborations for children and youth.

Six national organizations voted on the award, including the American Association of School Administrators, the International City/County Management Association, the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, the National School Boards Association

and the United States Conference of Mayors.

While the program is young — the idea began evolving in 1993 but didn't get funding until 1995 — it has demanded the attention of leaders throughout the country because of its success rate.

Many local leaders are crediting Project Unity's immediate achievements to its director, Jeannie Heller, who wrote a grant at the request of the Children's Partnership Board, which is a springboard of Bryan's Parent Education Partnership Program.

Bryan's school board president Bill Birdwell said that Project Unity likely wouldn't have received the award if it wasn't for Heller and others involved in the program.

Jeannie Heller is one of those people who goes far beyond her job

Project Unity programming played an integral part in winning this prestigious award," Heller said. "Project Unity is based on the premise that together we can be more effective in building stronger communities than if we worked alone."

Before the group built anything, it sought to eliminate some problems — duplication of services, gaps in services, mountains of paperwork and lack of communication.

The result to this dedication was a community effort involving city, state and county government, schools and neighborhoods, all working to make changes for the better.

The nonprofit organization opened a center in the summer of 1995 called the Project United Family Center at the Carver Early Childhood Center on W. Martin Luther King Blvd.

And now the program seems as though its been helping people for decades.

Some of its programs include

tion of more than 45 family service agencies; InterAgency Coalition which encompasses a wide-range of representatives from the government, educational system, churches and community; and Community Voices, a group of residents who take charge of the neighborhood and resolve issues facing families.

Birdwell said the award tells the people in Community Voices what they should already have known: Their voices do count.

"This award says that regardless of the obstacles, if we care about people, we will find a way to overcome the obstacles," Birdwell said. "The award also tells Bryan that it has found a way to bring resources to those unable to seek out those resources and services for themselves."

The award will be presented to Project Unity and its staff members in the next few weeks.

Birdwell said the award is a



Children's Partnership Board

JP
St. Joseph



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS FOR ALL
BRYAN

READ ALL ABOUT IT



Eagle photo/ Butch Ireland

Sisters Judy, 10, and Janet Tarrin, 6, of Bryan read books before the dedication of the Half Pint Library on Tuesday afternoon at Project Unity in Bryan. The 1,000-book collections at Project Unity and the Lincoln Center in College Station will be used for literacy programs.

Library dedicated to youth, adult literacy programs

By KELLI LEVEY
Eagle Staff Writer

Minutes after dozens of books were delivered to Project Unity on Tuesday, a cluster of youngsters settled in to read.

"Look at that. That's just what we want," said Jeanne Heller, director of the North Bryan center.

The 1,000-book collections at Project Unity and at the Lincoln Center in College Station are called Half Pint

count bookstore chain Half Price Books.

"It was a magnificent book drive," said John Mayner of the company's Dallas headquarters. "We thank the city and the community."

Heller thanked the company, as well. "We have to connect with community partners and Half Price Books has been a great partner," she said.

Although the official book drive has ended, books will continue to come in, said Bill Madden, district manager of the Bryan and North Houston book stores. "We'll probably be bringing 100 or so a

ing."

Heller said the library will be moved to the Kemp Elementary School gymnasium on the weekends. When 200 students and their Aggie mentors gather for The Positive Zone. Basketball is a major draw of the gatherings, but Heller said the occasions are prime opportunities to help youngsters and their parents improve their reading skills.

George Beckworth, who coordinates The Positive Zone, was coaching some of the youngsters on Tuesday. "These books are here for you all to read and have a great time," he

Community Partners

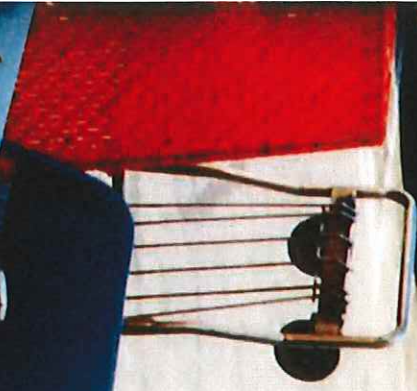
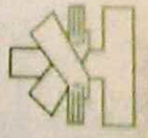


Community in Action
Becky Probst
FIRST American BANK

Brazos County
United Way



St. Jo
REGIONAL HE
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NEED HELP? PLEASE ASK
A TEACHER OR A PARENT

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Thank You

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Thank You

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Thank You

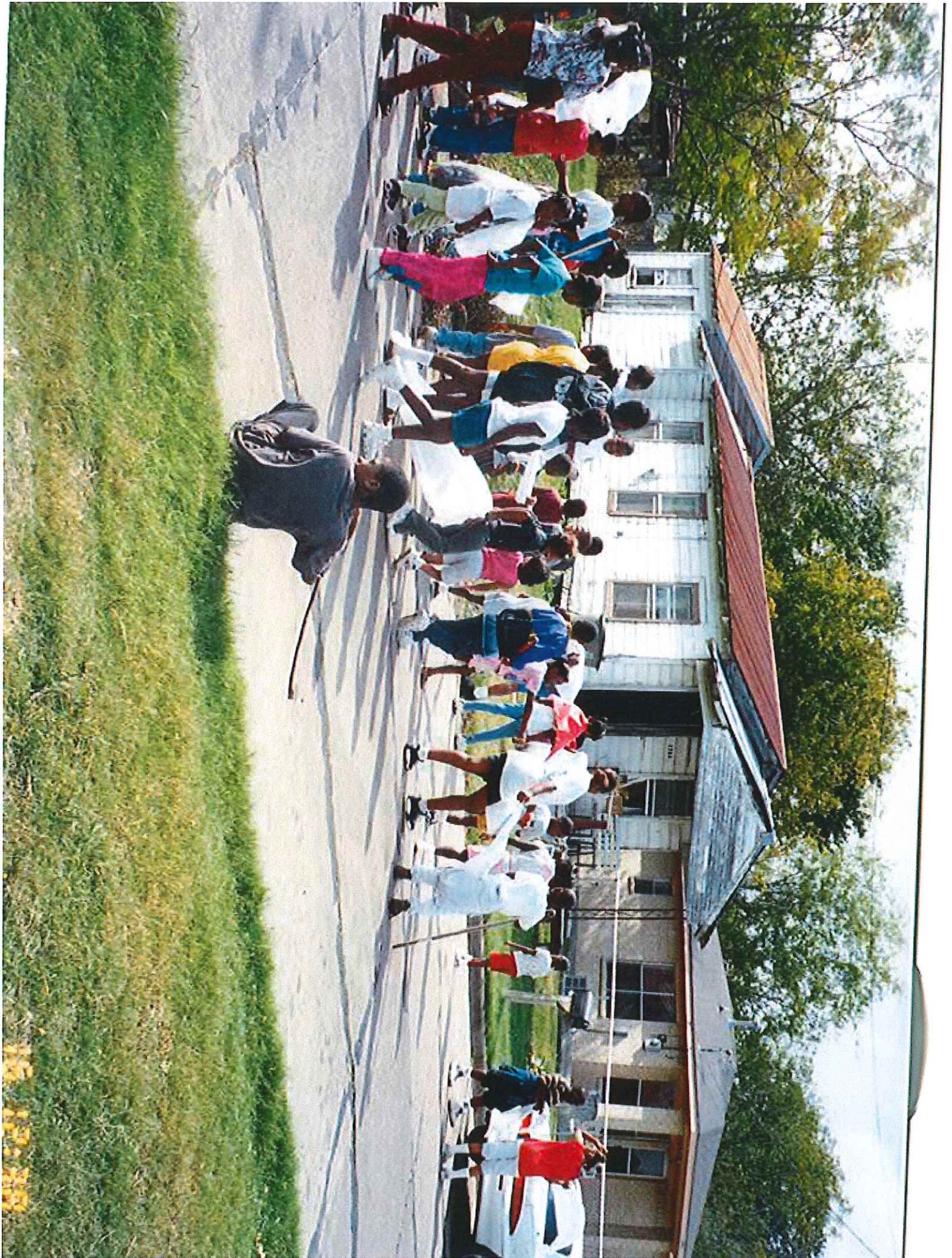
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PROFESSIONALITY
FAMILY
CÉN-TÉ-R
DRIVE TEAM



Professional Family Drive Team

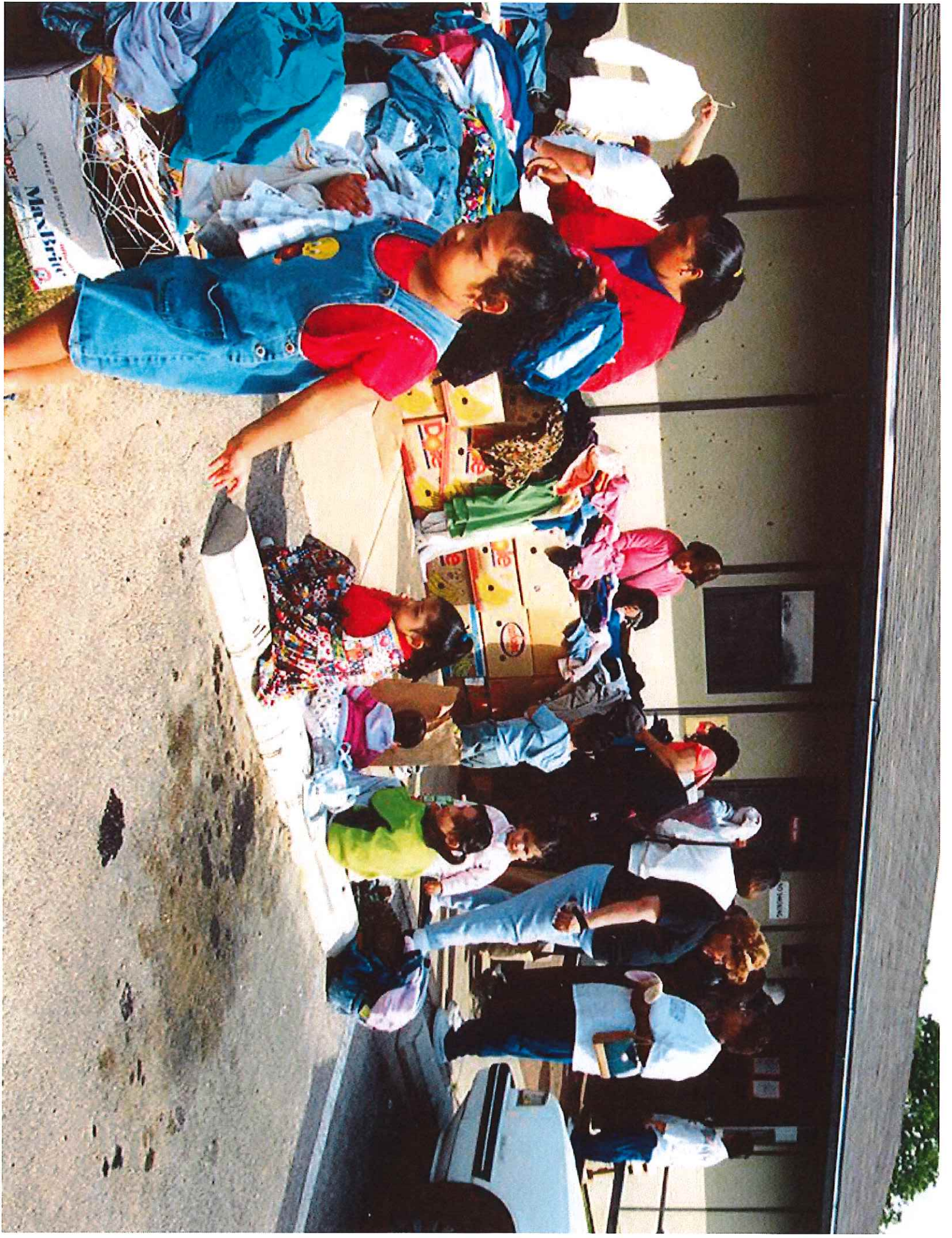




PROJECT
UNITY

THE
PROJECT





Agency frees families from poverty's grip

Over the past 20 years, the seven countries that form the Brazos Valley have been labeled areas of "persistent poverty." Obstacles are passed down like heirlooms from one generation to the next. For some, failure is a family curse.

Social worker Jeannie McGuire and her colleagues at Project Unity and her colleagues at Project Unity — a nonprofit agency dedicated to helping families —

hope to break that cycle by surrounding individuals with guidance, education and hope.

At a celebration recently, Project Unity and the Brazos Valley Council of Governments



McGUIRE

invited graduates of a family self-sufficiency program to share their success with others facing

Life begins at 30

In 1989, Jeannie found herself a divorced mother of three looking for that perfect career we all dream of having. Looking back at her 30-year-old self, Jeannie describes that period in her life as an awakening.

"I was going through a divorce and the loss of a marriage while trying to regroup and go forward," she says. "I think from loss, oftentimes, we learn to be open more to people who are hurting. All of the sudden, you're kind of awakened to that."

Jeannie worked briefly for MHMR, which only reinforced her awareness of families in crisis. And as a single mom, Jeannie was taken aback by the labels she encountered. The first time she heard "broken home" it almost broke her heart.

"These people are faced with having those labels every day," she says. "I see so much injustice, so much unfairness. People are judged based on their race or on their education levels."

Jeannie set out to change that. She began working as a single-parent educator for the Bryan school district, which allowed her to play a pivotal role in families with children from birth to age 3.

If a single mom needed help pay-

Last year, the Family Self-Sufficiency program often see...

"We're... Jeannie, at the agency... Bryan... Project...

and... One of... is a... the... administrator... seek... provides... program... rent... education... divorce...

Ex-president gives award

Project Unity receives honor

By KELLI LEVEY
Eagle Staff Writer

Project Unity director Jeannie Goss' ended her week the same way she started it: shaking the hand of a former president.

Goss happened upon President Clinton while sightseeing at New Orleans' French Market on Monday, but she said her meeting Friday with former President Bush was more rewarding. She received the Daily Points of Light award for her Bryan-based social services clearinghouse at a ceremony at noon, then she was honored at a reception Friday night at the George Bush Library Rotunda.

Most recipients just receive a certificate in the mail, but a beaming Goss got a hug and a kiss on the cheek with hers. Bush, who was in town for a forum to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the end of the Gulf war, personally delivered the award to Goss.

Bush congratulated Goss, then urged her to step forward and speak. Afterward, he joked with her: "Now, go back to work."

Bush has endorsed the Daily Points of Light Award, which was started during his presidency and was reinstated in 1998. The award recognizes programs and individuals who make a "positive and lasting difference in the lives of others." It is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation, the Corporation for National Service and the Knights of Columbus.

Bush said the need for volun-

teers is just as strong today when he started the program.

"Somewhere in America, a single social problem is solved through volunteerism," Bush said. "I encourage others to get involved, to go out and solve problems in your own community. The government just can't do it. Volunteering, that's what it's all about."

Another College Station resident, Kimberly Hall, was selected as the Daily Point of Light Monday for creating the "100 Days of Learning" program. Hall is children's program director at Memorial Student Center Hospitality, a service organization at Texas A&M University that has served the campus and the surrounding community for more than 29 years.

In the program Hall designs 100 A&M classrooms throughout Bryan and College Station on the 100th day of school at A&M. Each student will be provided with a new book and a literacy package aimed at promoting home literacy involvement. The program reaches each of the 2,000 kindergarten children enrolled in the Brazos County's 11 public schools.

Hall will receive a letter of congratulations from Bush and her project will be featured on the Web site Monday at www.pointsoflight.org.

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Eagle photo/Butch Ireland

Former President George Bush applauds Jeannie Goss, director of Project Unity, after giving her a Daily Points of Light Award on Friday morning at the George Bush Conference Center on the Texas A&M University campus.

Light Award on Friday morning at the George Bush Conference Center on the Texas A&M University campus.







Project Unity President Jeanne McGuire (left) and Community Action Partner of the Year Award honoree Ella McGruder, director of programs, accepted the award.

Project Unity honored for community service

By ARENA WELCH
Eagle Staff Writer

A local nonprofit group that often mediates between families needing assistance and organizations offering those services was honored Thursday with a first-time award from a fellow agency.

Project Unity, which was founded 14 years ago, received the Community Action Partner of the Year Award from the Brazos Valley Community officials

of the Year — that award describes Project Unity in its entirety," said Jeanne McGuire, president of Project Unity. "Our mission is to reach out and serve families with and through our partners. To get the Partner of the Year award, it's just an honor."

Project Unity was the perfect candidate for the Action Valley Community Award Agency's Inaugural award because of the close relationship between the two agencies, said Karen Garber, executive

"They really work to catch people who fall between the cracks, so they really supplement and enhance what other organizations like us are capable of doing," she said. "They end up making everybody a little bit better than they are."

The two organizations have worked together for more than a decade, McGuire said.

She said other agencies call Project Unity when there is a family for whom they just can't find resources, and Project Unity works to get that family what they need.

The organization offers its

own services, including a food pantry program, job training, parent education classes and case management. But it also mediates between families and other agencies for services not offered through Project Unity.

"It's a community where you have so much need and so many different services and agencies to provide those services for families, you can't exist without being interdependent," she said. "We try to fill in the gaps."

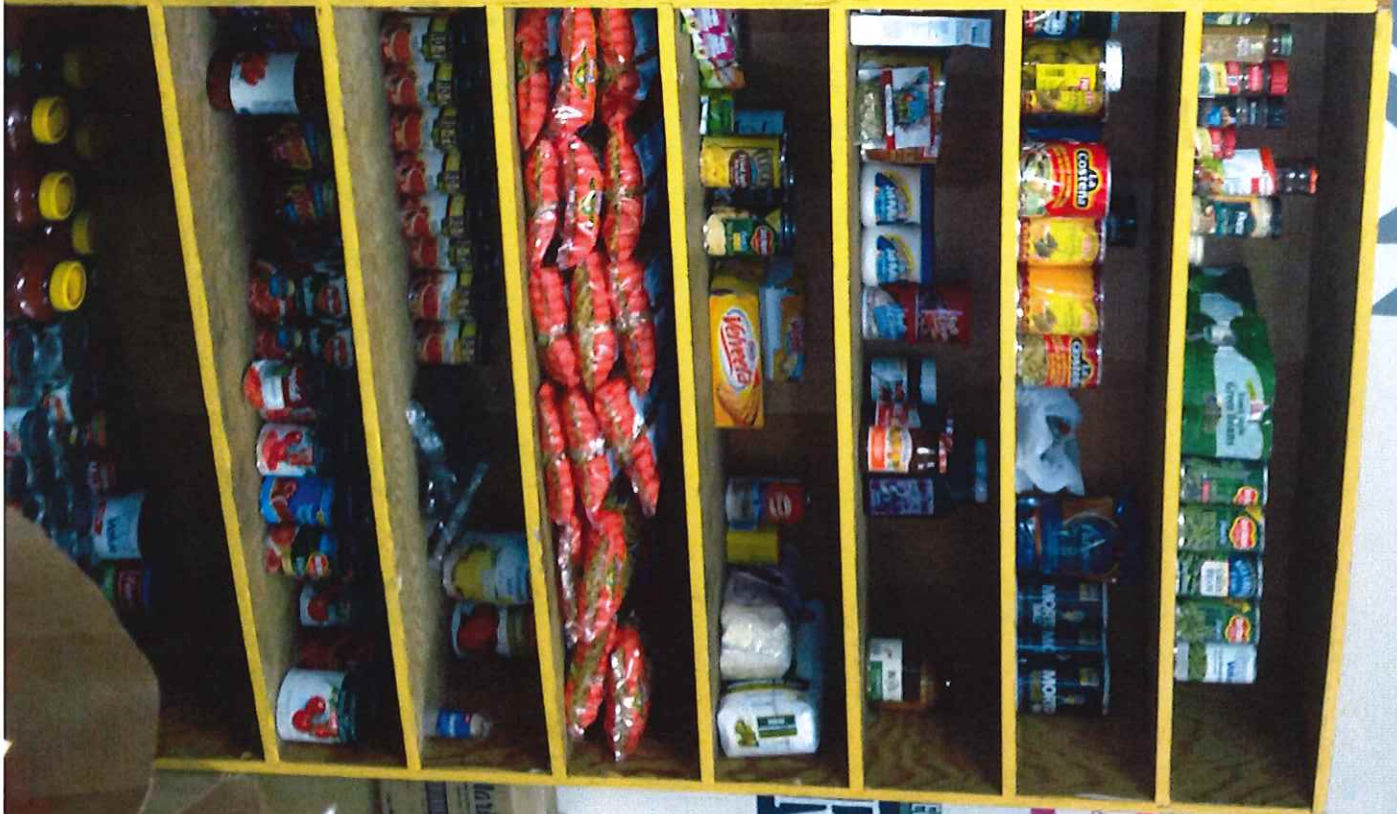
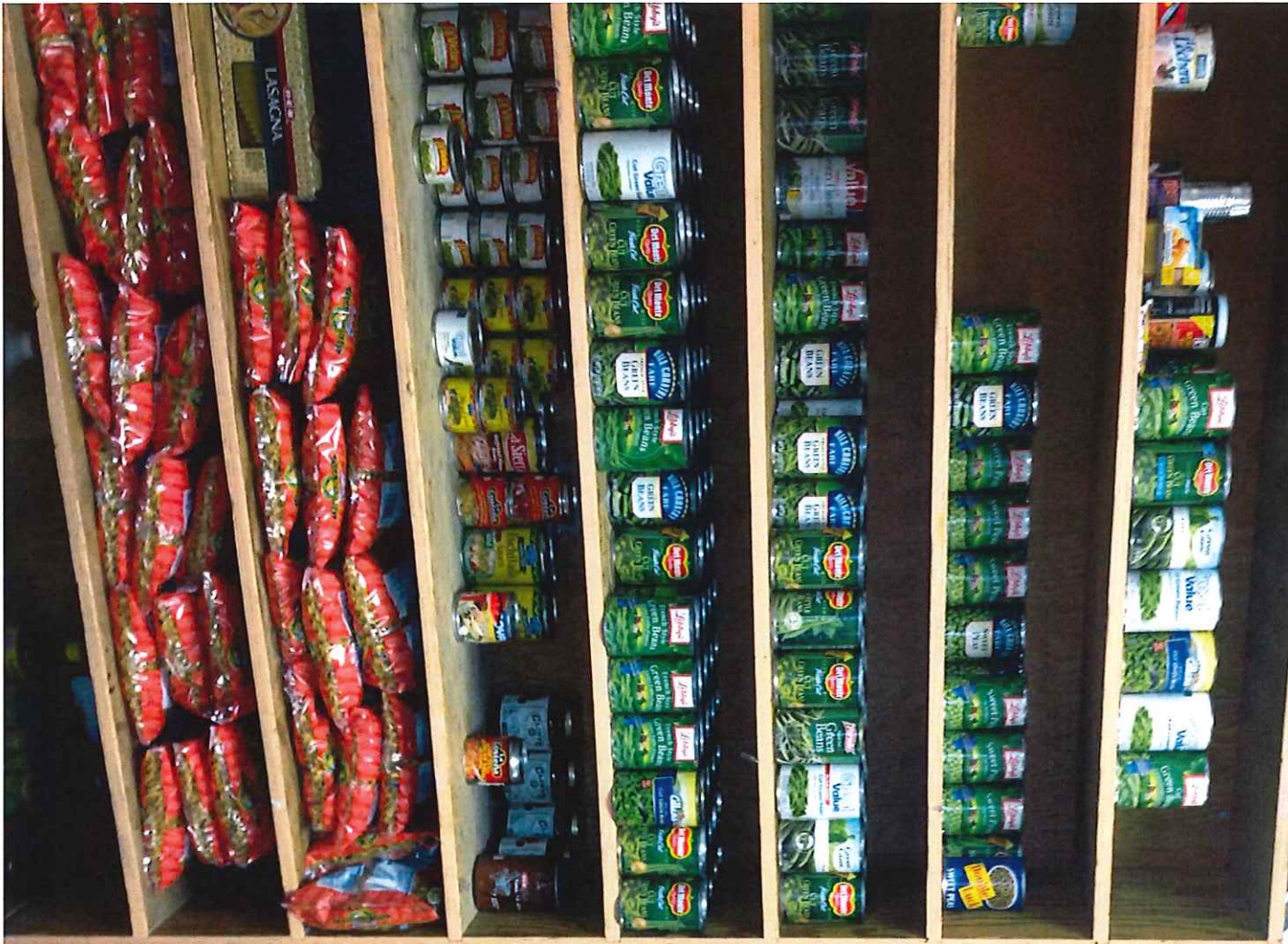


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REGION
Education Service Center



Joining Our Part
365 Days a Year

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BRAZOS
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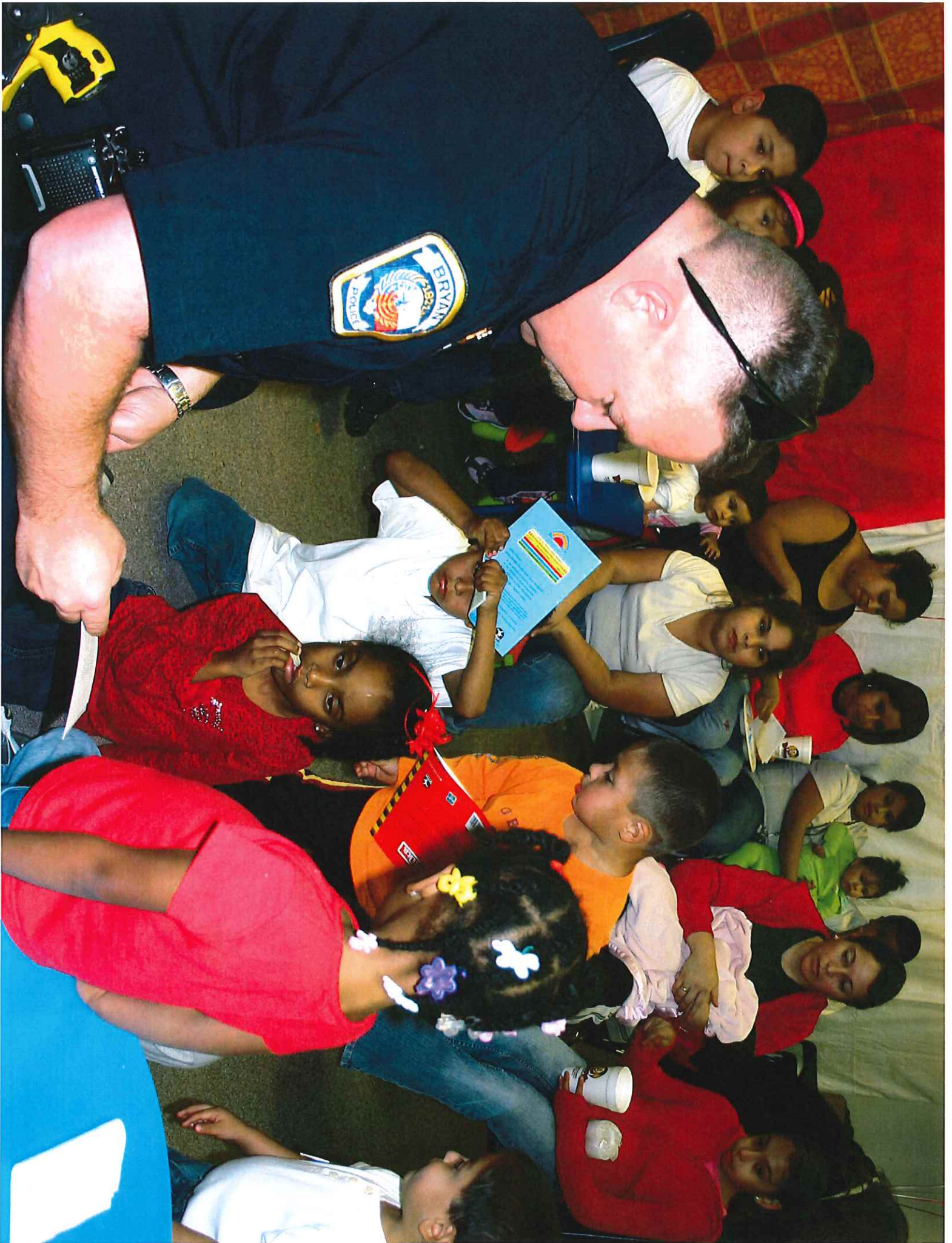
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Children's
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Law Office of
James & Reynolds

CITY OF STATION
the heart of the Brazos Valley





Youth Summit Just the Beginning

How many of us are careful every day *not* to make promises?

We have been taught from a very early age that promises are to be made only when they can be kept.



JEANNIE MCGUIRE

and our employers. It is used not to convey a positive affirmation but a negative one.

We hold "promises" over people's heads as leverage. "If you do not do what you promised, then I will never do anything for you again." One thing is for sure: Promises are often very hard to keep. Change is a certainty in life. Promises made on one day may not hold meaning the next.

Somewhere deep inside all of us, we are looking for those life circumstances where we can be true to our promises. There has never been a greater need in our society to keep promises to our youth.

America's Promise was created in 1997 at the Presidents' Summit for America's Future. At that time, Presidents Clinton, George H.W.

"You

promised" is often used by our children, our spouses, our parents, our friends

On Monday, the Brazos Valley will answer the challenge. The first annual Power of Five Youth Summit will bring together members of the community willing to make, as well as keep, five promises to our youth:

- That our children will have caring adults such as parents, mentors, tutors and coaches in their lives.
- That our children will be provided safe places with structured activities in which they can learn and grow.

■ That our children will be given a healthy start in order to have a healthy future.

■ That our children will be given an effective education that will equip them with marketable job skills.

■ That our children will be given the opportunity to give back to their communities through their own service.

America's Promise believes that every child needs and deserves every promise. According to a Gallup research study in 2005, fewer than one in three school-aged children in America are receiving four or more promises. The statistics tell us that we need to do better.

America has the highest child poverty rate of the 20 most developed countries. One in 11 young people reports having attempted suicide.

Clearly we do not live in a *Leave It*

shooting, a teenager killed at the hands of a drunken driver. Drug busts are an everyday event in the Brazos Valley.

How often do we wish the tragedies would stop? How often do we wonder what we can do? The

Power of Five Youth Summit is only the beginning. Throughout the year, the planning committee for the Community of Promise will be asking for volunteers to help show our youth through community activities that we intend to make and keep the five promises known to help them grow into healthy and productive citizens.

Between these events, every one of us should make a commitment to provide at least one promise to a child who is not our own. Can you imagine how our children and youth would thrive under these five promises?

On Monday, hundreds of middle school children from Bryan and College Station will feel the power of five promises.

And for all of us who want to make promises we can keep, remember the five promises every day throughout the year. Someone, whose name has been lost to history, said, "To the world, you may be one person, but to one person, you may be the world."

For more information on Brazos Valley's Community of Promise call 979-764-8100 or visit www.



Promises we must keep to our young

Robert Frost wrote of miles to go and promises to keep. This community has miles to go in nurturing and protecting our children, and we have promises to keep as we guide our youngest residents to become healthy, happy adults.

Elsewhere on this page you will find a column by Jeannie McGuire, the founder of Project Unity, that marvelous organization that helps families cope with daily life and assists them in accessing the help they need to be successful. In her column, McGuire writes about the Power of Five — five promises adults should make and must make to our children.

They are promises we must keep, not only for our children, but also for ourselves. Studies show that children who have had the five promises made to them and kept are up to 10 times more likely to become productive adults. As we look to the future of Bryan and College Station, it is obvious that for the community to continue to be successful, its residents must be successful.

The five promises aren't particularly novel, and they shouldn't be hard to keep if we all invest a little time and effort and a whole lot of love in our younger generation.

The first promise is that you will be a caring adult, one who is actively involved in caring for and guiding our young people. Promise 2 calls for safe places for our children to go after school, places with structured activities designed to keep them from getting into trouble. The third promise is to ensure that all children receive nutritious food and exercise to help them grow strong in body and mind. Teaching marketable skills is the fourth promise, while the fifth promise is to provide opportunities for our young people to learn and grow.







EXIT



Ummies

Great inspiration for active adults
 Great variety
 Health benefits
 Social skills
 Fun activities
 Great for social & fitness
 Learning Center (Learners)
 100% Pure
 100% Natural

Food House

Great variety
 Easy to use
 Low cost
 Local food
 Great for seniors
 Food stamps
 Social skills
 Fun activities
 Learning Center (Learners)
 100% Pure
 100% Natural

Employment

Great variety
 Easy to use
 Low cost
 Local food
 Great for seniors
 Food stamps
 Social skills
 Fun activities
 Learning Center (Learners)
 100% Pure
 100% Natural

Education

Great variety
 Easy to use
 Low cost
 Local food
 Great for seniors
 Food stamps
 Social skills
 Fun activities
 Learning Center (Learners)
 100% Pure
 100% Natural



HERITAGE

VA Clinic
 County/Specialty
 Health
 Dept
 Mental Health
 Agency (Private)
 PDS Community Health Centers
 Family Medicine Clinic
 All-Sun
 (HSA)
 Public
 Care Clinic
 (HSA)

Housing

- Grass Valley Housing Authority
- BVA Flexible Housing Choice
- PVCOG - Housing Choice Voucher Program/HUD
- Public Assistance program
- Habitat for Humanity
- Rental Utility Assistance
- CDBG & Home-Down Payment Assistance; Home Repairs
- Construction & Replacement
- US Disruptural Affordable Housing
- Community Development Finance Corp

TRANSPORTATION

Grass Valley Transit
 Volunter Van
 RSVF
 Church Van
 Area Agencies
 Onbusmen
 Medical Transportation

1/Stop
 Emerald
 Redline
 Limited Service
 Limited/Paratransit
 Local/Paratransit
 Local/Paratransit
 Local/Paratransit

Low Income Family

Low Income Family



Housing
Affordable housing is essential for economic growth and community stability. It provides a safe and secure environment for all residents, regardless of their income level. Investing in affordable housing can help reduce homelessness and improve the overall quality of life in our community.

Manufacturing
Manufacturing is the backbone of our economy, providing jobs and supporting local businesses. Encouraging manufacturing growth can help create new jobs and increase the tax base. We should support policies that attract investment and foster innovation in the manufacturing sector.

Transportation
Efficient transportation systems are crucial for economic development and quality of life. Investing in public transit, roads, and infrastructure can reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and provide better access to jobs and services for all residents.

Child Care
Child care is a critical need for many families, enabling parents to work and contribute to the economy. Expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care can support workforce participation and improve the lives of children and families.

Utilities
Reliable and affordable utilities are essential for businesses and households alike. Investing in infrastructure and energy efficiency can reduce costs, improve service reliability, and support environmental sustainability.

Food/Beverage
The food and beverage industry is a growing sector that provides jobs and supports local agriculture. Encouraging food security, food safety, and local food systems can strengthen our economy and improve public health.

Transportation
Investing in public transit and infrastructure can reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and provide better access to jobs and services for all residents.

Child Care
Expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care can support workforce participation and improve the lives of children and families.

Utilities
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Food/Beverage
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