Junior Auxiliary of Columbus, Mississippi
Award of Excellence Entry
2015

Since 1942, Junior Auxiliary of Columbus (JAC) has been providing a comprehensive range of services to the children of Lowndes County. JAC has achieved a reputation of excellence in the community and upholds that level through the work of 57 Actives, 13 Provisionals, and 36 active Associate and Life members for a cumulative total of 10,938 hours. The quality of each project is a result of annual intense evaluation to determine if the project can use improvement and if it is relevant to our children’s needs. Maintaining a rapport and communication with the Columbus City Schools’ Superintendent as well as Lowndes County School District’s Superintendent offers the organization unique insight into the changing needs of the students and how JAC can best support them. It is only through the diligent commitment and inspiring compassion of our membership to our community’s children that our projects enjoy success.

Service Projects

During 2014-15, JAC maintained 10 service projects. Active, Associate, and Life members contributed 5,107 service hours to these projects.

**Stand Up Speak Out** is JAC’s most recently developed project, which came at the urging of area schools. This program focuses on the effects of bullying, and the anti-bullying message is spread through a variety of interactions with students. Students in schools across Lowndes County have listened to speakers give their personal testimony about losing a child due to cyber bullying. They take part in interactive role playing scenarios to learn how best to be a good bystander when they witness bullying, and they submit songs, posters, and essays that illustrate their newly acquired knowledge of bullying prevention and their commitment to ridding their school of bullying behavior. This year, a Columbus native and former Mississippi State University quarterback, Tyson Lee, spoke with area students to urge them to no longer accept negative peer behavior. [23 members/ 211 hours/ $420/ 500 served]

**Choose Your Path** is designed to teach students that the choices they make today will have great influence on their future. JAC coordinates with school counselors to determine topics and problems that are unique to their school and grade level. Through motivational local, regional, and nationally-recognized programs, students in intermediate, middle, and high schools are informed, inspired, and challenged to choose the right path in their lives. Programs have a wide range of current topics such as science, bullying, cyber-bullying, health and fitness, drug use, drinking and driving, and even the experience of a prison sentence. Recent sessions have had an emphasis on prescription drug and alcohol abuse affecting teen and college students today. [7 members/ 43 hours/$3,500/ 900 served]

The JAC **Clothing Room** absorbs the greatest investment of service hours and financial resources. Teachers refer names of students who are in need of new uniforms and necessities to
help them meet their school’s dress code to school counselors. The school counselors coordinate with JAC through our innovative online template. JA members speak with each referred child’s family to schedule a fitting day, which the child leaves with plenty of uniforms. It is our hope that wearing a new, clean uniform can build confidence for students and allow them to more adequately participate in their academic endeavors. All active members participate in the project in capacities that include year-round restocking of our clothing room, planning massive purchases of uniforms, fitting children, and working with children’s parents to offer them assistance in their time of need. A spin-off of the Clothing Room is the In-Depth project, which assists victims of tornado, fire, or other catastrophes with clothing for adults and children. [52 members/ 917 hours/ $39,000/ 397 served]

Winner of the 2011 Norma DeLong Education Award, In My Shoes was created when an active member and parent to a special needs child expressed the need to educate students on the obstacles of handicapped children. This project gives 2nd graders the opportunity to step into the shoes and lives of children experiencing disabilities. Students participating in In My Shoes are read grade-appropriate books about vision and hearing impairments, autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome. The students use various manipulatives to simulate the difficulties in tying their shoe or zipping a zipper and other real-life scenarios. Students are amazed by the increased time and effort it takes to do tasks they may have once found quite easy. By the conclusion of the week-long fair, students have gained an understanding of their peers’ disabilities and are better able to understand the daily challenges of their friends with special needs. [20 members/ 113 hours/ $250/ 325 served]

Summer JAM is JAC’s intensive summer project. Actives assist students who have been recommended for summer school to build their math and reading skills. This seasonal project enjoys heavy involvement by the many teachers in the membership, so students receive quality, methods-based instruction to prevent the “summer slide” of skills. [25 members/ 113 hours/ $250/ 325 served]

Reality Fair brings a dose of reality to 11th graders about life after graduation. Students are given a “salary” based on their present GPA. The students visit various booths that mock real-life situations such as having to purchase a car, pay utilities, budget for groceries, etc. Students quickly see that their GPA-based-budget may not allow them to pick their dream car. Students are counseled about managing their resources responsibly and encouraged to strive for above-average grades so that may one day enjoy the reality of their dreams. [20 members/ 199 hours/ $110/ 380 served]

F³ (Fit and Fabulous Forever) is a project that resulted from a community-based survey that indicated that there was a need for a focus on children’s health. 4th grade students enjoy a health fair in which they visit seven booths. The booths were created with the Mississippi 4th grade health, nutrition, and science curriculum in mind. These booths offer exciting relays, astonishing science experiments to illustrate the sugar in certain foods, and even weighted vests during activities to feel the effect of extra weight. At the end of the fair, students are sent home with their own F³ Frisbee so that they may play and discuss their experience with their families. [19 members/ 133 hours/ $450/ 100 served]
Each year, JAC awards scholarships to a group of local, college-bound high school seniors. Candidates submit an application and essay and are selected based on financial need and academic merit. In 2015, four students were awarded one-time scholarships, and two students received annual scholarships over four years. In 2014, two new scholarships were created, the Eleanor Slaughter Excellence Scholarship and the Terry Brewer Service Scholarship. Both of these were established in memory of outstanding JA members, and the scholarship requirements were designed to echo what these two women most valued, excellence and service. [9 members/72 hours/$18,000/13 served]

JAC evaluates our projects at mandatory committee meetings for Welfare, Service, and Civic Projects and also an Overall Evaluation meeting. During evaluations, committee members meet with the chair to discuss the projects strengths, weaknesses, and offer suggestions for improvement. The project committees analyze the community’s need and determine if the project is still meeting it, or if the service is being duplicated elsewhere. At the mandatory Overall Evaluation, committee chairs read the evaluation feedback to the membership who then votes if a project is kept or discontinued.

National Service Project ~ Child Welfare

Junior Auxiliary Mentors (JAM) meet one-on-one mentoring with 2nd and 3rd graders. Each JAM team member mentors the same student over a span of at least two years. This project began at the urging of area teachers who recognized a correlation between academic and behavior issues with a lack of individualized attention in the child’s life. Members are assigned a child identified by the classroom teacher in September and meet individually with the child weekly throughout the entire school year. Visitors to Columbus schools often see JAM members visiting and sharing a snack with a child, reading with the child to help them with their reading goals, or tutoring them in a core subject. The children anxiously await their special JAM time each week, and teachers have seen a marked improvement in the children’s motivation, academics, and demeanor. At the end of each semester, students are awarded their own books to begin their own home library. Past honors of the JAM project include the Martha Wise Award of Existing Project (2009), the Martha Wise Award (1998), and the National Focus Award (2000). [25 members/235 hours/$100/25 served]

Finance

JAC hosted our 65th annual Charity Ball and used our “Report to the Community” insert in the local newspaper to provide full-financing for all projects. Many patrons and supporters attended the Ball and were recognized as sponsors as well as given a commemorative plaque. Corporate, community, business, and individual sponsors purchase advertising in the “Report to the Community” as a show of support for JAC’s many projects. This publication promotes awareness of the JA mission and educates the public on what JAC does for the children of
Lowndes County each year. This finance endeavor generated $150,863 in 2014-15. [70 members/2,526 hours/$150,863/700 served]

JA demonstrates fiscal responsibility through careful budgetary planning, an annual professional audit, and by keeping one year’s budget on reserve as recommended by NAJA. These monies are invested in a money market account for maximum safe interest earnings. This account is monitored monthly by the chapter as well as by an independent source. Additionally, the treasurer presents monthly reports to the membership for review, and a hardcopy of all transactions is available. JAC uses QuickBooks accounting software and maintains and updates it on the chapter’s onsite computer.

Continuing Education

JAC offers several educational opportunities throughout the year for its membership. This year, Melanie Benson, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, offered the chapter tips on maintaining a healthy home/work/volunteer balance and how to avoid volunteer burnout. Mrs. Benson motivated the chapter to identify individual strengths and utilizing those to best serve the organization. Also, NAJA’s own Marian Montgomery Chancellor provided a NAJA update and spoke on the topic of impact and influence in the community.

Community Relations and Involvement

JAC enjoys a unique rapport with the community as demonstrated by the great level of support we receive from the public. The chapter works closely with all area schools and their faculty, The Salvation Army, Red Cross, The Department of Human Services, Columbus Public Library, Mississippi University for Women, Main Street Columbus, WCBI-TV, The Commercial Dispatch, Baptist Memorial Hospital, and others. JAC has earned the respect of the community because of our intense commitment to its improvement. These organizations even reach out to JAC when a need is observed.

Life and Associate Involvement

Our Life and Associate members maintain a high level of involvement with our organization and are always there to lend a hand or offer valuable advice. They attend the May and November luncheons where they enjoy camaraderie with each other as well as with our Provisional and Active members. We update them quarterly through our publication, Lifeline, to let them know ways in which they can continue their involvement. The JAC Public Relations committee also works diligently to maintain a database of up-to-date contact information for each Life and Associate member so as to keep them connected to JAC activities. Associate and Life members also enjoy seeing “real-time” pictures of project happenings as they follow along on social media.
Associate and Life members contribute financially to scholarships as well as other service projects. These members make a strong presence at the annual Charity Ball as well as at the Ball week reception hosted in their honor. It is not rare to see an Associate or Life member helping out the week of Ball through flower arranging or other endeavors in order to make it a success. Many of these ladies continue to serve on projects with which they’ve formed a connection long after their years as an Active have passed.

Provisional Training

The Provisional Training course is the foundation for new members to understand the level of commitment, responsibility, and accountability required of all members. JAC finds this imperative to the future of our organization; thus, training occurs weekly for two hours per session over the course of six months. Provisionals go through a detailed study of the National and Local Constitution and Bylaws. All current Board members and committee chairs attend these meetings to speak about the duties and function of each committee. Provisionals are required to observe every project during their training. To better understand our heritage, this training includes visits from past Chapter Presidents and past NAJA Presidents.

NAJA Involvement

All NAJA correspondence was read to the chapter and answered promptly; all deadlines were met by JAC. We currently have one past Chapter President and past NAJA President serving as a NAJA Foundation Trustee. The Foundation Trustee, Celia Ford, was awarded the esteemed Betty Robbins Volunteer of the Year Award. JAC is also honored to have five past NAJA Presidents.

JAC submitted three projects for awards; these include the following: Louise Eskridge Crump Award for JAM/Summer JAM, Martha Wise Award for In My Shoes, and the Norma DeLong Education Award for Reality Fair.

JAC aims to have representation at all NAJA functions. The Columbus Chapter sent 14 actives to the Hattiesburg Area Meeting, 10 actives to the Olive Branch Area Meeting, and 26 actives to the 2015 Annual Education Conference.

The Columbus Chapter of Junior Auxiliary contributes to the NAJA Scholarship program in a multitude of ways. In order to support the NAJA Foundation, 100% of JAC actives annually donate $10 per individual; in 2015, this contribution reached $750. JAC also donates at the Platinum Crown Level for NAJA Graduate Scholarships. Lastly, a financial contribution totaling $250 was given to the NAJA Resource Center.