NORMA DeLONG EDUCATION AWARD
2016-2017

CHAPTER NAME Junior Auxiliary of DeSoto County

CHAPTER ADDRESS Jamie Fulton
President
P.O. Box 1065
Olive Branch, MS 38654

EDUCATION CHAIRMAN Sarah Samples

POPULATION CATEGORY 30,000 and above

COST OF PROJECT $1500

NUMBER OF ACTIVE MEMBERS INVOLVED 8

NUMBER OF ACTIVE CHAPTER MEMBERS 50

NUMBER OF PEOPLE SERVED Over the course of the year, we will reach approximately 2,400 students and at this time the character cabins have the potential of impacting up to approximately 25,000 children from birth to age fifteen.

Follow outline exactly in making award presentation.

I. How was the need for the project/program determined? (100 words or less, DOUBLE SPACED; WRITTEN IN THE SEQUENCE AS LISTED BELOW) Send one digital photo per entry either email or on disc.

II. Summarize Project — 1000 words or less
Include the following:
1. Complete description of project and how it was carried out.
2. Population of area
3. Number of Active members in Chapter
4. Number of members planning and hours spent in planning
5. Length of actual program/seminar, etc.
6. Number of Chapter members attending
7. Age range of participants
8. Utilization of NAJA Resource Center (if applicable)
9. Number of people served.
10. Public Relations information for project.

III. Project Evaluation – (300 words or less, DOUBLE SPACED; WRITTEN IN THE SEQUENCE AS LISTED BELOW)
1. Feed back from participants
2. Impact on community
3. Applicability of program to other communities
4. Worthiness to present to other Chapters
5. Plans to expand into the community and/or presentation by other organization(s)
I. JADC members witnessed the need for literacy programs in DeSoto County after working in our schools and from personal experience with their families. Through these experiences Character Cabins was created. By reading to groups of children at schools and libraries, members would be able to help promote the importance of literacy. Also, by creating book boxes and placing them throughout the community, we would remove the barrier many face in providing books for their children. The project was approved by the chapter and then we dove right into the planning stages to create and execute the idea.

II. 1. Character Cabins was organized to serve the children in our community by promoting literacy. It was determined that the chapter would purchase book boxes, fill them with books, and then place them in low income housing areas and local parks. This would provide children with the opportunity to borrow books, read, and return or share one of their books with the book boxes. The committee is also responsible for visiting local schools and libraries on a monthly basis to read to children.

In order to make this a successful service project, committee members had to secure and speak and with local schools and libraries to work out monthly reading schedules. Committee members are required to read at least once per month; however, they are not limited to just one reading experience. Many members used this opportunity to volunteer at their own children’s schools for monthly readings as well as reading at other schools and libraries each month. Local teachers were excited about Character Cabins. This allowed them to have a little break to complete other tasks when JADC members visited their classrooms/auditoriums to read. At each monthly reading, the JADC member would engage with the children and promote the importance of
reading often and for fun. Questions would be asked by the children after the readings and this would provide the opportunity to engage even more with the children, thus building rapport and establish a relationship between the JADC member and the school children. This also allowed our chapter member to find out what the children would like to hear at the next reading session.

Book cabins were purchased online and our chapter customized them by staining/sealing and placing JA logo decals on them. Cabins were installed on a 5ft 4x4 post in locations that would be easy for children to access. Lower income housing areas and community parks were our chapter’s priority in securing the locations. The committee contacted different locations that met our guidelines and plans were made for installations. Donated books were placed inside the cabins at the time of each installation.

To secure books we included our chapter’s Crown Club members. The Crown Club members contacted a local JADC sponsor and hosted a 1 day public book drive event at two CSpire locations. Committee members also involved other business sponsors and JA supporters to act as permanent drop off locations for our local community to donate books. Signs were placed at these locations promoting the project to the business customers.

One family in our community learned about the project when our chapter promoted the book drives via social media outlets and decided they wanted to get involved. This family donated over 250 books to JADC Character Cabins. The Fernandez brothers (Hudson, 6 years old and George, 8 years old) decided they wanted to collect books as
well as money to donate to JA during their joint birthday party in December 2016. Instead of receiving gifts for themselves, the boys asked their family and friends to donate books and/or money to go towards Character Cabins. These brothers have hearts of gold and it was so touching for our chapter to witness their love for our community and their giving hearts. We are so appreciative of their generosity and cannot thank them enough for their genuine hands on support.

After over 1000 books were donated to the chapter, more than doubling our 500 book goal, committee members wanted to label each book. Labels that included our JA logo, JA website, and project information were printed and placed each book.

Lastly, committee members had to install the cabins and fill them with books at the secured locations. This took place over a few different days when weather permitted, and included sites at the Hernando West Community, the ConXion Gym in Hernando, Lynchburg Mobile Home Park in Horn Lake, the ARK Nature Trails, Olive Branch City Park, and coming soon to Snowden Grove Park in Southaven. As mentioned we also had the support and help from the Fernandez brothers and their family, local government officials including Hernando Mayor Chip Johnson and Alderman Andrew Miller, and of course JA committee members.

2. The population in DeSoto County is over 108,000 men, women, and children.

3. DeSoto County has 50 active members in the chapter.

4. There were 10 chapter members that helped plan this service project and it took 30 hours of planning to create this service project.

5. It was determined that the length of this program would be indefinite. Reading to schools and libraries would follow the school calendar which consists of ten months of
reading sessions with year round book access at the Character Cabins and monthly
maintenance by our JADC members.
6. There are eight committee members that were part of this project.
7. The participants’ age ranges from birth to fifteen years old.
8. Our chapter did not utilize any NAJA resources to date; however, we believe NAJA
shares our desire to encourage literacy programs for children in all our areas.
9. There are approximately 75 students served each month during the monthly readings.
10. We have used our social media outlets to share information about Character Cabins.
Our Crown Club held a public book drive; flyers have been posted at supportive local
businesses, and local government officials have gotten involved by spreading the word and
assisting with several installations, there will also be an educational booth for the service
project at our Healthy Today, Healthy Tomorrow Health Fair (another JADC Service Project).
The cabins are also displayed in populated areas with our JADC logo and all Character Cabin
books have been labeled with JADC information, and information regarding the service
project is listed on our JADC website.

III. 1. Committee members have appreciated and enjoyed the flexibility of this project. It has
allowed members to work around personal and professional schedules, which also proved
to keep committee members communication with the schools/libraries quite strong, thus
resulting in positive, lasting relationships.
2. By reading to groups of children monthly, we are opening children’s eyes and minds to
the wonderful, useful world or reading, which is highly impactful on any community’s
success. By placing our cabins in low-income areas, we are providing access to children with
limited access to books outside of their schools.
3. Character Cabins is well received within our community, as well as surrounding communities. This project is truly serving to educate those around us on what our mission as Junior Auxiliary truly is. Local recognition of this project, especially with the Fernandez children’s hands-on support and enthusiasm, has served as inspiration for others to serve.

4. The worthiness and validity to present this project to other Chapters is extremely valuable. Literacy is a fundamental aspect of education and furthering one’s success and functionality within our world. Character Cabins is a fun, easy way to promote literacy and get all walks of life involved in serving others. Also, the flexibility this project has served its committee members well, thus improving involvement on our members’ parts.

5. We plan to expand Character Cabins in our community by adding cabins where needed and/or possibly requested. We want to obtain additional local business partners for book drives and promotional assistance.

6. We plan to continue, as well as expand, the monthly reading sessions by engaging additional Chapter members to read to more children in our community monthly.