Chapter Name
Junior Auxiliary of Harrison

Submitted by Name and Email Address
Meagen Malotte, megmalotte@yahoo.com

Address
Meagen Malotte
5697 Hwy 7 North
Harrison, AL
72601

Population Category
Under 15,000

Name of Project
Back to School Bash

Project Category
Outstanding Existing Project

Total Hours of Service Given by Members
61

Active Membership of Chapter
12

Number of Members Participating
12
Purpose of Project
For children to go to school with confidence and required supplies as well as a bag to carry it all in.

Cost of Project
2438

Number of Persons Served
400

Narrative
Martha-Wise-2018-Back-to-School-Bash-Final-Copy.docx

Digital Photo
JA.jpg

Sent from National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, Inc.
Harrison is a small, rural Arkansas town. The population is around 13,000 with 27% of that population’s income being below the poverty level. In Arkansas, the state average for children living in families with incomes below the poverty level is 23%. This means there are 4% more children living in poverty in Harrison. With that being said, there are just things that 73% of the population takes for granted, but that to the rest of the population is a luxury. It’s known that backpacks are one of these items. Several years ago the Harrison Fire Department would hand out backpacks to the community prior to school starting. When they decided to no longer keep up this project, a group of local, compassionate and motivated ladies stepped up and took it over. After the first year, they needed someone else with more volunteers to take it and they presented it to Junior Auxiliary of Harrison, asking them to adopt it as one of their annual projects. The amount of money needed to successfully put on this project was not something in the budget, but the need to keep the project alive was so great. Without fear, and with love for the children of the community, the vote passed to add it as a new project. It is now named “Back to School Bash.”

There is a lot of planning and organization involved in Back to School Bash. It is the project that requires the most time to plan and that requires the most organization and prep done prior to the event out of all our projects. We usually hold the event at the beginning of August, and we begin planning it in May. When we first took on this project it quickly grew. We did not just hand out backpacks, but we also offered haircuts and fun. First, we ask for donations from the community. We have several businesses in town that always give to this project as well as we find new ones that want to be involved. Secondly, we meet with the other nonprofit organizations that are involved to
begin coordinating with them. To make the event as big and effective as possible, there are several other organizations in town involved with this event. The Elks Lodge helped us fill the backpacks with supplies, and they also came out the day of the event and cooked hot dogs to serve. The Pepsi Company in town also donates drinks. The Boone County Library in Harrison holds the event in front of their building and is involved in the organization the day of the event. They made bracelets for each guest and checked everyone in. This bracelet has each station on it and was marked as guests went through the event, so they could not go to a station more than once. They also planned and setup games for the kids to do. The local Bikers Against Child Abuse Chapter comes out the day of the event and sets up barricades if needed. They also play with the kids and let them look at their bikes. Usually Police block off the street for us, and sometimes the Firefighters bring a dunk tank out and fill it up for added fun. The local Children’s Charity Ministry has a table and passes out hygiene bags. Lastly, we call the local hair school to come and give free haircuts. The day of the event someone from our chapter will go get their cosmetology chairs and set them up. After we have made all the calls and had meetings to begin the planning, we order the backpacks and the supplies to put in them. Once they are delivered, we take a few nights during the week and stuff all the backpacks with the needed supplies and tag each bag with the corresponding grade. The night before the project, we set up all the backpacks and organize them by grade level so we can easily hand the children the bag they need. There are no requirements; So anyone in the community in need can come and get a wristband that gets them a backpack full of supplies, a haircut, a hot dog and drink, a hygiene bag and
play some fun games. This is such a comprehensive event, and it's so great to see our community come together to put it on.

This project not only incorporates so many people in the community, but also incorporates our whole chapter. Since this project is a chapter favorite, it garnished full chapter participation. All twelve members helped in some way, whether it was serving the day of the event, getting donations, or stuffing backpacks, each person participated.

This project is loved by the chapter for good reason. The look on these kid's faces when they have a new haircut and brand new backpack is unforgettable. I cannot even describe to you the pride on their face. The parents are always so appreciative because a backpack and the most basic required school supplies on average are $85 per child in total. These families just could not afford that. Also many of these kids would go to school without haircuts, and this added part of the project gives them so much confidence walking in that first day. This project definitely meets the need we saw of kids being sent to school insecure and unprepared without the required supplies. Plus the excitement it gives them is absolutely priceless! 400 children received backpacks that day. We had 200 left over that were donated to local schools and charities.

This is a project that I do not see us retiring anytime soon. With 27% of the counties' children living in poverty and the amount of money it takes to send a child to school that first day, let alone multiple children, there will always be a great need for this project. We are thrilled to be a part of this! We are already looking forward to next year's Back to School Bash!