Chapter Name
Junior Auxiliary of Houma

Submitted by Name and Email Address
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Address
PO Box 8031
Houma, LA
70361

Population Category
30,000 and Above

Name of Project
Santa Sneakers

Project Category
Outstanding Existing Project

Total Hours of Service Given by Members
230

Active Membership of Chapter
35

Number of Members Participating
35
Purpose of Project
Santa Sneakers provides well-made sneakers to needy children in our community. This project has met the need of our community for the past 30+ years. Not only do the children receive shoes, they also get a great day of fun by being able to participate in games, crafts, eat food, and get their picture taken with Santa.

Cost of Project
9000

Number of Persons Served
300

Narrative
2019-Martha-Wise-Award-submission.docx

Digital Photo
santa-sneakers.jpg

Sent from National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, Inc.
Santa's Sneakers

Junior Auxiliary of Houma

Santa's Sneakers is a project that the Junior Auxiliary of Houma is very proud of because of the legacy it represents for us. Santa’s Sneakers has been a service project in our organization for 30 years. The project was conceived out of the recognition that there are many families in our community that are unable to provide their children with new shoes, much less shoes of quality or shoes that fit them properly. Having quality, supportive shoes is crucial to a child’s physical development, and many of the children in our community must accept hand-me-downs from their older siblings. This can mean the shoes are often worn out and don’t fit well once the child receives them. The project’s purpose has always been to provide well-made shoes for some of the needy children in our community and this service project continues to serve that purpose 30 years later. The Junior Auxiliary of Houma continues to maintain the idea that it is truly important that these children are given the opportunity to have quality shoes that are specifically purchased for their particular need and size.

At the project’s conception, JA of Houma decided to provide the shoes to children around Christmas time, hence the name of Santa’s Sneakers. Over the past few years, we have been able to provide 120-140 pairs of shoes to needy children in our community. Because of the huge success of our finance project, Moonlight Masquerade, this year we were blessed to increase our budget to $9700 which is almost double the budget we have worked with in the past. Because of this financial blessing, we were able to grow the project and provide shoes to 300 children this year!
Although this event takes place once a year during Christmas time, preparation starts long before Christmas arrives and it is an "all hands on deck" endeavor with 230 hours put into the preparation for this event. Committee meetings take place throughout the year and the list of children is collected in October of each year. This year we were able to provide shoes to children at ten of our local schools as well as the foster children that are currently in state housing. We do our absolute best to not turn anyone away. A fitting takes place in November to ensure the children are receiving the correct size and then the shopping commences! An attempt is made to purchase most of the shoes around Thanksgiving time in order to take advantage of the spectacular sales that are offered around that time of year. Many of our members are able to live out their Black Friday fantasies by purchasing hundreds of pairs of shoes.

The Santa's Sneakers event takes place at the beginning of December and is fun for all involved, not just the children receiving the shoes. Santa of course makes an appearance and the children are able to take pictures with him free of charge, a luxury that many of them would otherwise not be able to afford. There are also lots of activities going on during the event such as writing letters to Santa, making Christmas ornaments, and taking selfies with the fun props. Delicious treats are always provided as well.

Because of the historical importance of this project, our by-laws now require that all members work at least two hours of some portion of this event. Although only two hours of participation are mandatory, members often give more than their mandatory hours because the project is so enjoyable and fulfilling. All 35 members were actively involved in Santa's Sneakers this year, whether it was at the shoe fitting, the shopping
extravaganza, the wrapping party that takes place the week prior to the event, or working at one of the many crafts and activities tables at the event itself.

Increasing the number of shoes we provide at Christmas time was not the only way that we were able to expand Santa’s Sneakers this year. Although this project began as a Christmas event, this year a “Christmas in July” event was included. JA of Houma decided to assist with one of our other service projects, Haven Helping Hands, to provide shoes and small goodies to the women and children in the local domestic violence shelter this past summer. And we aren’t stopping there! Santa’s Sneakers also plans on continuing to expand this project with an Easter event. This event will involve another one of our service projects, the School for Exceptional Children. In addition to helping out with the school’s annual Easter Egg Hunt, we are excited to announce that we will be purchasing shoes for the students at SEC.

We are very proud of the legacy this project has left and we are even more excited to see where the future of this project is going. Although the needs of our society and the Junior Auxiliary of Houma has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, the need for quality, properly fitting shoes remains the same for the children in our community. Because we realize that the need for shoes doesn’t only exist around Christmas time, we are excited to be able to provide shoes to different families at events throughout the year. We look forward to being able to provide even more shoes to needy families for the next 30 years.