

Johnson City Press

WHAT THE PEOPLE DON'T KNOW *WILL* HURT THEM

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Supplies for needy to be routed to schools

By Sam Watson
Press Staff Writer

KINGSPORT — Efforts to provide school supplies to underprivileged children are going directly to local schools this year to guarantee that those in need will receive the goods, an organizer said Tuesday.

"We do not want to abuse what people are giving," Elder Ronnie Collins said in a news conference for the "Tools-for-School 2000" campaign. "We want to make sure it gets to the right people."

Collins, president and chief executive officer of Joshua Generation International Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to youths and low-income families, said the group hopes to raise nearly \$70,000 to provide free school supplies to 7,000 K-12 students in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

In previous years, the supplies were distributed directly to schoolchildren in "Back-to-School Jam" parties at Glen Bruce Park. This year, the supplies will be delivered directly to schools from

Office Depot, where the discounted supplies will be purchased in bulk.

"Last year, we had 4,000 people show up. Over 1,800 kids got supplies, and we could not determine if they were all low-income," Collins said in the news conference at Office Depot's Kingsport location. "So, we want to do it better."

Principals and school counselors will identify children who require the supplies, develop lists of needs and distribute the supplies accordingly. School staff members have access to free and reduced-price meal records and personal knowledge about students to assist in the identification process.

Eligible students in Upper East Tennessee's eight counties, east Knoxville and the seven counties and three cities of Southwest Virginia will receive free filler paper, notebooks, scissors, pens, pencils, markers, crayons, glue, erasers, dividers, folders and other basic supplies early in the school year.

Office Depot Manager Chet

Christian said local store officials have discussed taking the concept to a national level.

"We're talking to our upper-level management and working with them to see where can go with that," Christian said.

Because Office Depot is co-sponsoring the program by providing the discounts and delivering the items to schools, organizers are asking for cash donations rather than pre-purchased items. Each \$15 donated will fund the necessary supplies for one child.

Collins said the group is sending letters requesting donations to the region's businesses and organizations, and he hopes media attention will help solicit individual contributions. No golf tournaments, door-to-door campaigns or other fund-raising events are planned.

"We basically are just coming to the community," he said, "and 100 percent of what we get goes to the project. So far, the area has been very supportive. I can't ask for any better."

Along with the school supplies, Collins said, the group hopes to

fund 15 scholarships for local students to attend college. The effort has resulted in 19 scholarships, including full and partial scholarships to Blountville-based Northeast State Technical Community College, over the past three years, so the goal would nearly double the results in one year.

"We'll put at least \$1,000 to each child," Collins said. He added that the only criteria for applicants are being low-income and receiving acceptance to a college or university with no restrictions for race or gender. "It's for any school they get accepted to. We may not be able to pay the whole thing like we can at Northeast State, but we can put \$500 per semester on each one of those."

Donations should be sent to Tools-for-School 2000, the Joshua Generation, P.O. Box 3390, Kingsport, TN 37664-3390. Schools interested in participation should contact George Hutchinson at Office Depot's Kingsport location at 378-3594 or Donald Key at the Johnson City store at 610-0676.