

## CITIZENS COME TO THE AID OF EDUCATION IN GASTON COUNTY

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The Gaston County School Board, after struggling for several weeks with a budget that county commissioners say must be cut by more than \$1 million, finally got some good news Monday night.

Some Gaston County residents showed up with proposals to fund drug treatment programs and provide air conditioners for some older school buildings.

Even better news came in the form of a \$10,000 check presented to the school board by Jim Falls, president of Sun-Drop Bottling Co. of Gastonia.

The check was the final payment on a \$50,000 challenge gift that Falls had promised last spring if students and teachers in the public schools could raise another \$50,000 for a new drug treatment center in Belmont.

Called the Rotary Adolescent Drug Treatment Center, the center is operating in a building behind the Catawba Heights Baptist Church near Belmont Abbey College. A permanent facility will be built later on 4 acres of land the Abbey is leasing to the center for 30 years at a cost of \$1 a year.

The center, founded by the Gastonia Rotary Club, began accepting patients early in June and has six patients ranging in age from 16 to 18. It has a full-time staff of 12, including six therapists who offer treatment in group therapy sessions or in individual therapy sessions when they are needed.

Falls, who owns the Sun-Drop soft drink franchise for the central Carolinas, had presented the school system with a check for \$40,000 last spring after challenging the students, teachers and other school personnel to come up with up to \$50,000 in matching money that would provide half the start-up cost of the drug prevention program.

``They raised their \$50,000 almost immediately,`` Falls says proudly. ``They did it by the end of May or the first of June, prior to the end of school last year.``

Falls says he became involved when he learned that drugs had infected Gaston County and the schools here, particularly in schools attended by young people from families in the upper-income level. ``We are doing this because this is our country and we live here and we want everyone to become a part of the fight against drug abuse,`` he said.

Ed Munn, president of the school advisory committee and a member of the Robinson School PTA, also appeared Monday night to ask the school board's approval of a PTA plan to air-condition two older buildings at Robinson Elementary.

The school has five buildings. Two, which were built recently, have air-conditioning. The PTA plans to raise \$12,000 to \$13,000 to air-condition two older buildings. The Robinson Elementary PTA takes on a school project each year. The money is raised through drives, sale of Christmas wrapping supplies, carnivals and gifts.

The third proposal approved by the school board Monday night involves expanding an existing anti-drug program that operated in Forest Heights Elementary School and Clay Street Elementary School last year. Called ``Just Say No,`` the program for youngsters in the fifth and sixth grade is endorsed by President Reagan's wife, Nancy.

Mack Stafford, assistant principal of Forest Heights Elementary and a member of the Evening Optimist Club in Gastonia, which is sponsoring the program, said 105 students in his school were involved in the program last year. They responded with great enthusiasm, he says.

Stafford says Evening Optimist Club President Bill Gray and other members plan to approach other Optimist groups in the county about a coordinated fundraising effort to put the Just Say No program in as many schools as possible. The program costs an estimated \$750 per year per school. It focuses on the peer pressure that often encourages drug use.

“Parent-teacher organizations may help finance the program in some schools,” Stafford says. “We also hope that some local industries will come up with some gifts to help. Even something as small as \$25 or \$50 would be appreciated.”

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