

MALL PEP RALLY TO WRAP UP WEEK OF DRUG ABUSE PROGRAMS

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- Author/Byline: KATHY NIXON, Staff Writer
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Several Gaston County organizations have joined with WGNC radio to sponsor a ``Just Say No`` week of radio programs, ending with a rally, designed to teach youth to say no to illegal drugs and alcohol.

``Drug and alcohol abuse is a serious problem in Gaston County,`` said Tish Merrill, WGNC sales executive and a former parole officer with the N.C.

Department of Corrections who did substance abuse counseling as part of her job. ``We wanted to do something to address the problem but also an upbeat type of activity.``

``This week's activities came about as a result of Project Winn,`` Merrill said.

Project Winn was a study of human needs in Gaston County conducted last year by the United Way of Gaston County. The survey polled Gaston residents who identified alcohol and other drug abuse as the No. 1 problem in the county. ``We (the station) wanted to do something to help with the problem,`` Merrill said.

Talk shows featuring counselors from local youth and drug treatment programs will be aired each day at 10:30 a.m. on WGNC (1450 AM) beginning Monday and continuing through Friday.

Kicking off the series Monday will be Frank Edwards, executive director and counselor and Charles Odell, counselor, both from the Rotary Adolescent Drug Treatment Center in Belmont.

Other speakers include Bogey Wingfield, founder and director of Gaston Families For Drug-Free Youth, Tuesday; Melissa Summer of the Gaston-Lincoln Area Mental Health Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program, Wednesday; Ben Ellington and Bart Crawford, counselors at Horizon Youth Services Inc., Thursday; and Dawn Anthony of the city's Adolescent Health Service department, Friday.

The drug abuse program ends Saturday with a ``Just Say No`` rally at Gaston Mall. The rally will feature demonstrations by senior and junior varsity cheerleaders from the county's senior high schools and booths distributing information about drug abuse.

Several groups including the Lions Club, Elks Club, Charlotte Treatment Center and Gaston Families For Drug-Free Youth will sponsor booths, Merrill said.

Judges for the cheerleading demonstration will be Gaston County District Court Judge Harley Gaston, state Sen. Helen Rhyne Marvin (D-Gaston), District Attorney Calvin Hamrick, County Manager Phil Hinley, Sheriff Leroy Russell and Barbara Greenburg, a homemaker.

``There will be awards given to the cheerleading squad that has the most creative cheer with the say no to drugs` theme,`` Merrill said.

The cheerleading demonstrations begin around 11 a.m. and the booths will be open all day at the mall.

- Caption: PHOTOMerrill

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VACUUM CLEANERS GO A LONG WAY IN HELPING HOLY ANGELS CLIENTS

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- Author/Byline: DAVE BAITY, Gaston Neighbors Editor
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Sister Nancy Nance, community relations director at Holy Angels in Belmont, was excited Wednesday as she loaded five reconditioned vacuum cleaners into the back of her station wagon.

The housecleaning tools were headed from the Gaston County United Way offices in Gastonia to the Belmont residential developmental center for multihandicapped children. They will help the center's clients become more independent individuals, Sister Nancy said.

Holy Angels was founded 31 years ago by Sister Patrice, a Catholic nun with the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy of North Carolina, to give custodial care to children who suffered profound or severe mental retardation, along with other handicaps.

The center is on the campus of Belmont's Sacred Heart College, which also is operated by the Sisters of Mercy.

About five years ago, Holy Angels was expanded into a developmental center that has 46 clients from throughout the state, ranging in age from 2 to 18. The center accepts children of any race, creed or sex, and its fees are based on what the parents can afford.

The vacuum cleaners - part of 50 donated by Electrolux Corp. to the Gaston County United Way, through United Way of America's Gifts-In-Kind Program, for use by charitable and human service agencies - will fit into that developmental training, Sister Nancy said.

"Most of our children have severe or profound mental retardation, with other handicapping conditions," Sister Nancy said, "and most are not able, because of medical reasons, to attend the public school programs for the mentally handicapped."

"But," she said, "each Holy Angels client has the right to education and help in developing to their maximum potential, whatever that potential is."

The small group of Holy Angels clients who are able to attend the public school programs will use the vacuum cleaners to learn a job skill, she said.

Each center classroom also will have a vacuum cleaner that will be used to teach individual independence.

"This is the third shipment of reconditioned vacuum cleaners we have received from Electrolux over the past three years," said Peggy Lenard, director of financial management for United Way of Gaston County. "Electrolux Corp. has been extremely generous."

The firm has donated 97 cleaners to local agencies during the past three years, she said.

Other recipients of the recent shipment included the Pioneer Girl Scout Council, Piedmont Boy Scout Council, Flynn Fellowship Home, Camp Sertoma, Gaston Skills and the Stanley Emergency Relief Fund, all United Way agencies. Non-United Way agencies receiving cleaners, in addition to Holy Angels,

were the Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center, Loray Girls' Home, Gaston Residential Services and four programs affiliated with the Gaston/Lincoln Area Mental Health Program.

Previous donations through Gifts-In-Kind included new clothing from a division of Sara Lee Corp., digital printers from Digital Equipment Corp. and typewriters and copiers from the 3M Corp.

- Caption: PHOTOS Staff Photo by CURTIS: Sister Nancy Nance (right) gets a hand from United Way's Barbara Vorhees as they load one of five Electrolux vacuum cleaners into Nance's car for children at Holy Angels in Belmont.
 - Memo: Commentary: Dave Baity
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