

CLEF gears up for school drive

By PAUL FALLON

STAFF WRITER

Although the Charlotte Local Education Foundation's school supply drive has been underway since early June, the organization is still in need of backpacks for area children.

"Right now, I think we're a little short on supplies, especially backpacks," said Mary Fred Clemmons, CLEF executive director.

This is the fifth year the organization has held a back-to-school supply drive, Clemmons said. The drive will continue to run through the end of August, she added.

All Charlotte County McDonald's locations will begin collecting school items from Aug. 1-3, Clemmons said. Every Fifth Third Bank location in the county will accept monetary donations to purchase additional supplies for the program until Aug. 1, she added.

"We're going to have plenty of drop-off points," Clemmons said.

All three branches of the Charlotte County Tax Collector's Office currently are accepting donations for the supply drive, she said. The office has helped to conduct a student supply drive for more than 30 years, and has worked with the CLEF on its drive for the past five, said Vickie Potts, tax collector.

"We do it to help out the community and the children," she said.

Not only do the offices serve as drop-off points for donations, but the staff members also bring a wide range of school supplies for the drive, she said. Potts added that seeing the children's reaction when they get their new school supplies makes all of the work well worth the effort.

"The kids are just ecstatic," she said.

Chief Deputy Tax Collector Dora Smith believes the program is essential for families who are struggling financially.

"These are tough economic times, and we need to do what we can to help people," she said.

Clemmons received about six boxes full of items from the Tax Collector's Office on Tuesday. The items all were brought by staff members with the department, Potts said.

Donations can be dropped off at the Tax Collector's Office at the Murdock Administration Building on Murdock Circle, as well as the office at 410 Taylor St., Punta Gorda; and at the Englewood office at 6868 San Casa Drive.

"I hope the community's participation is overwhelming this year," she said.

Charlotte County Public Schools spokesman Mike Riley believes the program has been supported staunchly by the community in the past, and that residents will continue to donate needed items through July and into August.

"Our community is very supportive of programs like this," Riley said.

The program is very helpful for parents who are struggling to make ends meet, and the items all go to needy children, he added. School guidance counselors identify which children need supplies. The items then are distributed to the children through the schools, Riley said.

Riley went on to say the program can help children who otherwise would be embarrassed to ask for supplies once they get into class.

"When a child shows up to school without the items they need, it can be very demoralizing," he said. "But once they get their supplies, they're good to go."

The program also encourages children to give back once they reach adulthood, Riley said.

"When kids see this kind of giving in their community, they model that behavior later in life," he said. "And the ones that received supplies aren't going to forget it."

The CLEF also will accept monetary donations for the program. Checks can be made out to the agency and dropped off at its office at Charlotte Technical Center, 18150 Murdock Circle, Murdock.

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Charlotte County Tax Collector Vickie Potts, left, holds a backpack that has been donated to the Charlotte Local Education Foundation during the school supply donation drive. Mary Fred Clemmons, executive director of CLEF, holds folders donated during the drive.



SUN PHOTO BY PAUL FALLON

Charlotte Local Education Foundation Executive Director Mary Fred Clemmons, left, picks up school supplies for the donation drive at the Charlotte County Tax Collector's Office. Chief Tax Deputy Dora Smith, center, and Tax Collector Vickie Potts, right, have participated in the campaign for years.

DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

- Cultural Center of Charlotte County, 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte
- CenturyLink, 1020 El Jobean Road, Port Charlotte
- BankUnited, 4265 Tamiami Trail, Charlotte Harbor
- Coldwell Banker Morris, 2828 Tamiami Trail, Punta Gorda
- Charlotte County Tax Collector's Office branches: 18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte; 410 Taylor St., Punta Gorda; 6868 San Casa Drive, Englewood
- Copperfish Books, 1205 Elizabeth St., Punta Gorda
- Charlotte State Bank & Trust: 3002 Tamiami Trail and 24163 Peachland Blvd., Port Charlotte
- Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce: 2702 Tamiami Trail, Port Charlotte; and 311 W. Retta Esplanade, Punta Gorda
- Universal Fitness, 1544 Rio de Janeiro Ave., Deep Creek
- K's Family Restaurant, 2000 Rio de Janeiro Ave., Deep Creek
- Culver's, 385 Kings Highway, Punta Gorda
- Deep Creek Elks Lodge, 133 Capricorn Blvd.
- Consulate Health Care of Port Charlotte: 18480 Cochran Blvd.
- Charlotte Stone Crabs game, 6 p.m. Aug. 2 at Charlotte Sports Park, 2300 El Jobean Road, Port Charlotte
- McDonald's — all Charlotte County locations, Aug. 1-3 (KIX Country will be doing a live remote broadcast from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 2 at the Charlotte Harbor Restaurant, 4695 Tamiami Trail)