

BUCKNER IN LUBBOCK: A place to call home_110303

October 31, 2003

Posted: 10/31/03

BUCKNER IN LUBBOCK: A place to call home

By Russ Dilday

Buckner News Service

LUBBOCK-For more than 25 years, members of the Joy Sunday School class at First Baptist Church of Lubbock have opened their hearts and wallets on the first Sunday of each month to collect a special offering.

Those gifts provide allowance money for children living at Buckner Children's Home in Lubbock.

For 25 years, the same member, class secretary-treasurer Alline Jones, has deposited the money the following Monday and faithfully written a check to the home.



Buckner
seniors
Barbara
Franks,
Amber
Perez
and Vicki
Harris
are
preparing
for life on
their own
in a
better
way than
they
could
have
dreamed.

“Allowances are important to children,” emphasized one member. “As we raised our own children, we allowed them to have money of their own.”

“When we put that money in an envelope, we know it's going to Buckner,” said another. “We're very aware we're giving to missions.”

A third, pulling a well-used bookmark from her Bible, read a passage from it to defend the class's commitment to children: “It will not matter what my bank account was, what kind of house I lived in or what car I drove, the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.”

The bookmark was published years ago by Buckner.

Melissa Opheim, administrator for Buckner Children and Family Services of

Lubbock, said the allowance money brings joy and satisfaction to the children as well.

“When they receive their allowance, they receive recognition for how hard they've worked all week with their chores,” she said. “We don't know how far a little recognition like that will go.”

While Buckner has services in more than 20 communities across Texas, Lubbock is the site of one of four Buckner residential group homes, a traditional children's home campus. The others are in Beaumont, Dallas and Mission.

Buckner also works in Lubbock through innovative community programs, foster care and after-school programs.

As a life-long Lubbock resident and real-estate agent by trade, Mayor Marc McDougal understands the role Buckner plays in Lubbock.

“I've been around Buckner all my life,” he said. “I'm a member of Oakwood Baptist Church, and I remember, growing up, going over there and taking Christmas presents or clothes.”



At First Baptist Church of Lubbock, a member of the Joy Sunday School class contributes her monthly gift for the children at Buckner.

“They do a lot things,” he said. “We talk (in city government) about doing after-school programs and the need to do more, and Buckner already has them in place. It keeps children off the streets, helps them with their homework and provides them with activities after school. I think that's a very important community service Buckner provides.”

When three housefuls of boys, all residents of Buckner Children's Home, pile out of their vans and cars at First Baptist Church, many of them are teens who come with what Opheim calls a “pretty tough shell.”

However, that shell softens when someone touches their lives, she said. That someone is likely to be a member of the youth leadership team at First Baptist, where Youth Pastor Jimmy Storrie said members determined “early on that we were going to treat the kids at Buckner just like the rest of our kids.”

“We made a concerted effort among our youth leaders to treat them like

family,” he said. “They have the same needs as the kids who live with mom and dad—they need someone to love them, they're looking for someone to encourage them, for someone to give them hope, for someone to give them guidance along the way.”

Opheim believes “the moment of transition for our kids is the moment they accept Jesus Christ in their lives. And then the responsibility is to grow that. First Baptist provides those role models for that and the encouragement they need. The kids come down here and fit in, and it's so cool to be a part of this youth group.”

“We're a partner with Buckner,” Storrie said. “They do a great job out there with the kids, and we help with a spiritual connection.”

Some families have had five children graduate from high school, but what about five in one year? That's life at Buckner Children's Home this year, where seniors Barbara Franks, Amber Perez, Vicki Harris, Reba Reed and Billy Thornton are preparing for life after Buckner.



Youth
Pastor
Jimmy
Storrie
says the
church
determined
early on to
treat the
Buckner
teens just
like any
other
teenager.

They agree that life changed dramatically for them after arriving on campus.

Harris, a 12-year resident, remembers little of life prior to Buckner. “They took me away at 3. We lived in a shack. We had 10 kids and only two bedrooms. We never did get out. Everywhere we went, we had to walk. Here, I have more room. I get to do more things than I would have at home, and my mom can work for herself instead of 10 kids.”

“When I got here, I didn't care about anything,” added Perez. “I was hurt. I was separated from my parents for no reason, it seemed like to me. But I got used to it. It made me want to change, because I used to be bad. I want to graduate, I want to go to college now. That's one reason I didn't go back home, because I knew if I went back, I'd be locked up right now.”

Franks tells a similar story. “Whenever I came here, I found out that a lot of people thought I was going to be like my mom. She was 14 when she got pregnant, but I don't want to be 14 and have a kid.

“I started going to PAL (Preparation for Adult Living), I started getting help,” she said. “I know if I was still at home, there would be no way I'd go to college. My world has changed. I never had a role model that (showed me) this could be done. I want to prove to myself that it can be done.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.