

Make a Difference Day 2020

For the past twenty years, United Way of Northwest Georgia has celebrated Make a Difference Day on the fourth Friday and Saturday in October. This year looked a little different from years past due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but United Way is here serving our community. Brown Industries and Phenix Flooring were the co-sponsors for this year's Make a Difference Day, and we had a total of six volunteer projects.

United Way of Northwest Georgia is honored to participate in Make a Difference Day each year. "Even though this year has been difficult for in-person events, at United Way, we know how impactful our Make a Difference Day projects are within our community. We spared no effort in working to provide safe in-person volunteer opportunities that adhere to CDC guidelines. We are committed to Building Better Futures within our community. In addition, Brown Industries and Phenix Flooring's sponsorship has ensured that countless lives will be improved through these volunteer projects." *United Way President, Amanda Burt.*

Phenix Flooring partnered with United Way to install a Born Learning Trail at the Chatsworth-Murray County Library. Phenix Flooring employees painted the pavement and placed signs along the paved sidewalk at the Chatsworth-Murray County Library, in Chatsworth, GA. In 2019, Brown Industries and Phenix Flooring employees installed a Born Learning Trail at Harlan Godfrey Civitan Park on N. Tibbs Rd, in Dalton, GA. The Born Learning Trails include activities to promote early learning and advocate for family health. The Born Learning Trail is a series of 10 interactive signs that offer fun, active learning activities for young children and their families. Signs are available in English and Spanish and feature different activities that engage early childhood developmental skills. Activities along this trail work alongside United Way's strategic guideline of getting kids ready for kindergarten, reading at grade level by 3rd grade, and graduating on time with skills to be career and life-ready. These trails will help parents, caregivers and members of our community create quality engagement opportunities when out on a stroll or visiting a local playground. Go check out the new Born Learning Trail at the Chatsworth-Murray County Library and turn everyday moments into learning moments!

"The Phenix Make a Difference Day volunteers are excited about the educational value the Born Learning Trail brings to children and their families who frequent the Chatsworth-Murray County Library. This is a very meaningful project to everyone."

–Amy Bradford, *Human Resources- Phenix Flooring*

Brown Industries partnered with United Way to re-install the Little Free Library at Valley Point Middle School. The Little Free Library had to be removed due to construction at the Middle School. In 2018, United Way partnered with Brown Industries to design and manufacture 27 new Little Free Libraries in Dalton, Whitfield County, and Murray County parks. These "take a book, leave a book" structures are just big enough to hold 20-30 books, creating access to reading material across the community. One of the unique concepts is that no one can steal the books because the books are "free". Neighbors freely give from their own collections, used bookstores, authors, and others who love the sense of community that the Little Libraries create. The idea is to promote literacy and community building by supporting book exchanges. The purpose of these libraries is to provide a place where all readers in the community can share books throughout the year. Participants can leave books to share with others in the box and take a book they would like to read.

“We are very excited to be a part of Make a Difference Day. We love being a part of benefitting our whole community through the Little Free Libraries project. Our team at Brown Industries looks forward to seeing the lives impacted through the educational opportunities this project will provide.” –Stuart Nelson, *President- Brown Industries*

The United Way Young Leaders Society held a school supply drive for local children in need. The Young Leaders Society were able to help many local children. The school supplies were delivered to United Way Community Partner, Boys and Girls Club. The Boys and Girls Club of Northwest Georgia provides a nurturing environment for children with after school and summer programs assisting in education, vocation, health, and fitness. When things shut down due to COVID-19, the Boys and Girls Club was there. They were providing meals every day, providing fun and engaging activities, helping youth academically, and giving youth fun social activities in a safe and positive environment. In addition, Young Leaders Society Co-Chair, Josh Young, led a volunteer project at Woodlawn Elementary School where the volunteers painted three four square courts on the pavement for the students to enjoy.

The United Way Women’s Leadership Council assembled 45 household supply baskets for Family Support Council’s Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. Murray and Whitfield Counties reflect the state and the nation in some of the largest numbers of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Often, grandparents assume this obligation when the grandchildren’s own parents abandon them or when the children can no longer live with them because of the parent’s mental disorder, substance abuse, or incarceration. Consequently, the grandparents have the added burden of caring for children who suffered from abuse or neglect by their parents. Many of the grandparents are likely to be in poor health and under a financial strain, in comparison with non-relative caregivers. These grandparents generally receive few economic supports, and the economic support only covers food and not household supplies. Most of these grandparents are often unaware of community resources available to them. The program helps provide monthly support group meetings, quarterly special events, bi-annual fun activities for grandparents and grandchildren, and a one-week day camp for grandparents and their grandchildren.

The Board of Directors from the Artistic Civic Theatre volunteered at United Way Community Partner, Big Brothers Big Sisters. They worked on grounds beautification. They planted flowers around the new sign. Big Brothers Big Sisters helps children realize their potential and build their futures. They nurture children and strengthen communities. Big Brothers Big Sisters operates under the belief that inherent in every child is the ability to succeed and thrive in life. Big Brothers Big Sisters is the nation’s largest volunteer-supported mentoring network, they make meaningful, monitored matches between adult volunteers (“Bigs”) and children (“Littles”), ages 4 through 18, in our local community, and develop positive relationships that have a direct and lasting effect on the lives of young people.

This year was also the 26th annual event of the Conasauga River Watershed Clean-Up. Volunteers rolled up their sleeves and cleaned up trash from the river and banks at the following eight locations: Conasauga River at Carlton Petty Road Bridge, Conasauga River at Highway 2 Bridge, Conasauga River at Lower King’s Bridge/Norton Bridge, Holly Creek, Murray County, on the Chattahoochee National Forest, Mill Creek tributary in the City of Dalton, Lakeshore Park in the City of Dalton, Crown Creek in the City of Dalton, and Conasauga River Snorkeling Hole, TN. This year the largest piece of trash removed from a waterway was a recliner!

United Way works year-round to fight for the education, basic needs, and health of every person in our community. We’re in the business of Building Better Futures. Let’s do something about it and LIVE UNITED. Visit ourunitedway.org for more information on how to get involved.