

EUGENE J. BUTLER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Sylvia M. Johnson, Principal
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(904) 630-6900
(904) 630-6913 (FAX)

Dear Bright Holidays Family,

Sometimes it is difficult to put into words the impact of kindness and sacrifice for others. Many of our families have trouble trying to articulate how they feel about the giving of people they do not know. In an effort to make an attempt to share with the donors as many reflections as we could, we decided to have a roundtable discussion with our students and their family members to capture a glimpse of just how **Bright** their **Holidays** were because of you. Try to “sit at the table” in your mind to hear what they had to say:

- Ahseiyim was baffled that someone who did not know her would choose **“new clothes that really look good on me!”** She is very shy and we were thrilled that she wanted to show her gratitude.
- Enaffit is a Haitian student who simply could not stop smiling. She asked if she could give out gifts to other students as she was one of the first to receive her gifts. **“I want to learn how to give stuff since I never had anything to give.”** She was amazing at delivering and celebrating the joy of others. **“Now I understand! This feels great!”** She did not open one gift until all the others had been delivered.
- Anya was unable to speak for a while. She has been homeless ever since she has attended our school. She will move on to high school next year and stated that, **“No one can ever take away my memories...even if I never get another gift. Just look at this...”** Mama tearfully shared that she could not believe her child was loved three years in a row by Bright Holidays Angels.
- Denard is an exceptional education student and he is usually non-verbal. He jumped up and down and ran around the table. I asked him to settle down and his response was, **“I can’t...I have new shoes just for me!”** His grandmother shared that they were his first that were not hand-me-downs.
- Vicky was overwhelmed and asked if she could leave her gifts at school and change. When asked why, her answer was, **“At the group home, they might disappear.”** We made arrangements.
- Three brothers were absolutely shocked to be chosen. They already decided how to share the gifts one of them might receive. When the bags were unloaded and there were three of them, the screaming began, **“All of us? No**

way! Oh, my God...that is unreal. I can't believe it! We are so lucky!" Mom corrected them quickly and stated, **"That is no luck, son...we are blessed!"**

- There are many more, but each year, one always stands out and this year it was Jason and his Mom. When we arrived at his home, both of them were waiting and were very nervous. We unloaded the bags and when Mom saw the coat and the sleeping bag, she fell to the floor in tears. I helped her up and she held me so tightly that I could not move. She wept and kept asking, **"Why?...Why would somebody do this? I can't write a note, so what can I do? My baby has a new coat!"** Jason put his arms around her to calm her, looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, **"You were right Dr. J.....it's still some good people and now my Mama won't have to keep me home when I miss the bus. I can walk and be warm....thank you...I just thank you."**

These words are examples of the gratitude of our students and their parents. They represent the sentiments of the other students and parents. I will never be able to fully explain the impact of true, sacrificial giving. Should we be so blessed again, we must videotape the deliveries and expressions so you can experience the joy of seeing the faces of the recipients of this blessed ministry.

I love you and thank you more than you can possibly know. Blessed children learn better!

Sylvia

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY

#240

Robert L. Snyder, II
Principal
(904) 745-4923

1520 Sprinkle Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32211
(904) 745-4944 FAX

January 8, 2008

Dear Bright Holidays Foundation,

Words cannot express how grateful we are to the Bright Holidays Foundation for selecting our school to participate in this year's Christmas project. The families who received the gifts were truly touched and for many tears flowed freely. The reactions of the parents and children truly moved me and I wanted to let you know just how appreciative they were.

One mother received the family's presents and profusely thanked everyone who was around. She asked how we knew what she needed and we told her the principal of the school had referred her. She then gathered all her belongings and went home. A couple of minutes later she returned and demanded to speak with the principal. The principal was in a meeting, however this did not stop her, she asked if she could go into his office to thank him for giving her name to Bright Holidays. She told the principal how much the gifts would help her with the holidays.

Another mother upon getting the gifts sat down and cried. This single mother of two children, one of whom is an infant, said this did not feel real, she could not believe there were people out there in the world who were so generous. This mother was having a difficult time providing lunch for her son, gas for her car, as well as paying for after-school care. She said the generous gifts she received would help her catch up on some of her bills and hopefully get a little ahead.

One fifth grade girl, whose father was disabled while fighting in his home country's civil war, has stopped me everyday to talk about the gifts. I have afternoon bus duty and she comes over to me and talks about this or that gift or tells me she is going to wear an outfit she received the next day.

However, my favorite story comes from a single mother of two. When opening her food gift cards and the presents the boys received, she broke down with tears streaming down her face. She told me that her children were not going to have a Christmas and she did not know how to tell them. She said she did not know how to thank me or the Bright Holidays Foundation. Afterwards our school found out the family was living in a hotel at that time, because they could not afford a permanent home. We have since learned this family's situation is improving.

These are just a few of the families your generosity and kindness have touched here at Arlington Heights Elementary School. Your spirit of giving inspired us all and created Bright Holidays for our students in need. Thank you again for all that you have done for our families and the other families around the city of Jacksonville.

Sincerely,



Anna Kimball
School Counselor

Pine Estates Elementary School No. 250

"Where Excellence Is The Expectation"

Violetra C. Ward
PRINCIPAL

10741 PINE ESTATES ROAD EAST
(904) 696-8767
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32218



May 27, 2009

Mr. John Forrester
Bright Holidays Organization

Via email: jforrester@brightholidays.org

Dear John:

On behalf of the entire faculty, staff and student body at Pine Estates Elementary, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for Bright Holidays' generosity during the 2008 holiday season.

For more than three years now, Pine Estates has been a recipient Bright Holidays' support and the number of lives touched by Bright Holidays has been simply amazing. More than that, on arrival to deliver gifts, we have always been greeted with a warm welcome and a heartfelt attitude of thankfulness. It has been touching and memorable.

This year, due to the nationwide economic hardship, many individuals expressed their honest lack of the basic necessities; many were in need of food and clothing. It was a humbling experience to hear the unfortunate stories and experience the tearful outbursts of fathers or mothers who had recently lost their jobs. For many, these are indeed difficult times but the gifts provided by Bright Holidays appeared to give a tremendous amount of hope for better days in the future.

I have enclosed one letter from a mother who had recently lost her job and a second letter from her two children. I am sure you, too, will find in the sentiments of the letters, a simple "thank-you" seems inadequate for an organization that has done so much.

Again, I express my heartfelt appreciation for your generosity during the holidays and continued support for our students at Pine Estates Elementary School. I look forward to working with you and the Bright Holidays Organization to provide more hope for our children and families.

Best regards,

Violetra C. Ward, Principal
Pine Estates Elementary

Ps. We also appreciate Bright Holidays' funding of school lunch accounts through mylunchmoney.com.



Responsibility

Mandarin Middle School

5100 Hood Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32257
Ph.: 904.292.0555 Fax: 904.260.5415

Joy Recla
Principal

Artie Brown
Vice Principal

May 26, 2009

Bright Holidays has done so much to make the holidays joyful for a number of students at Mandarin Middle School. Students are identified by their classroom teachers, based on their observation of need. We also ask for demonstrated good citizenship and hard work in classes. In the years since they have adopted us, a number of deserving children have had much happier times during the holidays.

Middle school is a time when "fitting in" is so important. When many families in our community have incomes to afford the current status symbol, whatever it may be, it's hard when your family can't. I asked Bright Holidays to purchase one of those items for a needy student. I asked for the smallest item, an ID case. The shopper went above and beyond, getting the student the purse as well. She was so proud when she returned from the vacation. As they mature, they hopefully find that there is much more to life than whatever is "in", but at 13 it is dreadfully important.

This year a brother and sister were nominated to receive gifts. When the mother came to pick them up, she burst into tears. She told us that, without these gifts, her family would have had no Christmas. The mother died in February. What wonderful memories these children will have of the last Christmas with their mother.

Currently we have several children receiving lunches because of Bright Holidays. We set up Mylunchmoney.com accounts for them and Bright Holidays funds these accounts. While some of these students might have qualified for free lunches, several told their teachers they were too embarrassed to apply for the program. It's very different now because they "won" these lunches by being good students.

Bright Holidays brightens the season for the adults as well. I see teachers cry when their students receive these gifts. I have the best job in the world when I get to play Santa and hand the gifts out to the children. One student looked in the bag and asked if she got to choose one present. She was thrilled when she discovered they were all for her. Her mother had recently passed away and Dad was having trouble coping with Christmas.

Thank you for all you do for us at Mandarin Middle School.

Yours truly,
Joy Recla
Principal



J.E.B. STUART MIDDLE SCHOOL

4815 Wesconnett Blvd.
Jacksonville, FL 32210

(904) 573-1000
Fax: (904) 573-3213

Mr. Gregory D. Bostic
Principal

Dr. Arvin Johnson
Vice Principal

01/05/2009

To: Mr. John Forrester and Members of Bright Holidays
~~24532 Deer Trace Drive~~
Ponte Vedra Beach, Fl 32082

I am writing in response to the generous support provided to the family of one my dear students at JEB Stuart Middle School. As a public school administrator, I experience the callous reality of students come to school without their basic needs being met. Many are oblivious and even apathetic to the obstacles that many students face very early in life. Many of these students have hard working families who, for various reasons, experience temporary or prolonged hardship. These experiences have tremendous implications for students who are charged with mastering an academically demanding curriculum, high stakes testing, and becoming socialized in a manner that orients them to a free, capitalistic, and democratic society.

Thanks to you and your organization, one of my students and her family had a better holiday season. It genuinely warms my heart to know that individuals and organizations such as yours care enough to help less fortunate students and their families. I commend you on this considerable effort. I truly believe that if every capable citizen contributed only a modicum of support to children who are in need, we would have no students coming to school without their rudimentary needs being met.

Gracious individuals and organizations, such as Bright Holidays, help make this a better community for all. Again, thank you for supporting my student, her family, and the overall community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. O. Johnson", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Arvin Johnson
Vice-Principal
JEB Stuart Middle School
904-573-1000 Ext. 117
johnsona10@duvalschools.org



Greenwood School

EDUCATING STUDENTS WHO LEARN DIFFERENTLY

January 7, 2009

Bright Holidays

Attn: John Forrester
24532 Deer Trace Drive
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082

Dear John:

On behalf of the Greenwood School, and the Greenwood families that Bright Holidays assisted, I would like to thank you. The dedication and support provided by Bright Holidays for the needy in our community reflects the truest meaning of Christmas and giving.

Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time to make Christmas a little brighter for our Greenwood families. I know that they were extremely appreciative for the gifts they received.

We wish you a happy and prosperous New Year!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet', written in a cursive style.

Janet Wesley
Community Outreach
jwesley@gsjax.org

9920 Regency Square Blvd. - Jacksonville, FL 32225 - 904-726-5000

www.greenwoodjax.org



Ortega Elementary School

June 4, 2009

Dear John Forrester,

I would like to thank you and your organization, Bright Holidays, for helping a family in need at Ortega Elementary during the 2008/2009 holiday season. Without your gift, that particular student and his family would have had a dismal holiday. Thanks to Bright Holidays the student and his family were able to experience firsthand what the holidays are truly about. We need more organizations like Bright Holidays that are dedicated to impacting the lives of students and their families in our community.

Your generosity was greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vickie Kummer".

Vickie Kummer
School Counselor
Ortega Elementary School
kummerv@duvalschools.org
(904) 381-7480



NORTH FLORIDA SCHOOL

223 Mill Creek Road
Jacksonville, FL 32211

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John Forrester
Bright Holidays
24532 Deer Trace Drive
Ponte Vedra, FL 32082

Dear Mr. Forrester,

I want to recognize you and everyone involved with "Bright Holidays" as being our community heroes.

This past holiday season you were instrumental in providing complete happiness for three families here at The North Florida School for Special Education. Our students have mild to moderate developmental disabilities and face many challenges in life. As is the case with the three families you helped this year, many of our students are from low income homes and don't have the resources to provide gifts during the holidays.

I can assure you that the three students that you helped this year were incredibly touched by your kindness. One of the greatest memories in a child's life is waking up on Christmas morning and seeing that Santa Claus has made a stop at their house.

On behalf of our students and families, I want to thank you and Bright Holidays for being Santa Clause this year and for providing our students the ability to have a gigantic smile on their face Christmas morning.

Thank you for being our community heroes!

Sincerely,

Dave Ward
Executive Director

*Preparing for Independence
Educating for Life*