

Partners in education

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 Businesses' support helps school thrive

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Maria Bell dropped by Peachcrest Elementary School one day to deliver a Mary Kay order to a customer.

She ended up donating a copier and later signed on as one of the tiny south Dekalb school's business partners.

"At first, I didn't think I would be able to offer anything," Bell said. "I don't have children. I wasn't sure about the whole partnership."

But the school's principal, Marshall Boston, convinced Bell his school needed her support. He mentioned how part of his school was housing overflow students from overcrowded Farrington Elementary, forcing teachers to wait in line for the copier. Bell happened to have a copier. Bell happened to sell on eBay.

While some school leaders approach major corporations for donations, Boston has focused on small local businesses. The owner of a beauty supply store donated \$500 in gift cards for parents who attend PTA meetings. An Avon sales representative donated gift baskets. A local restaurant delivers discounted meals on Thursdays for teachers and provides birthday cakes for staff members.

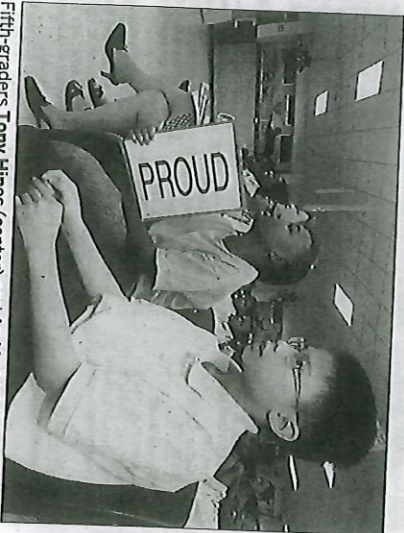
Boston talks up businesses that support the school in hopes that parents will patronize them.

"Being here in south Dekalb, sometimes our community members may not be proud of where we live, but we have great businesses," Boston said. "We don't have to shop outside of the community."

Peachcrest is a low-profile school, tucked away in a residential neighborhood off Covington Highway. Students have met expectations on state tests for the past three



Tony McIntyre, owner of All American Specialties, a plaque and trophy company that supplies the school with awards, stresses the importance of community involvement during the ceremony.



Fifth-graders Tony Hines (center) and An Vu (right) listen during the ceremony. In a speech, An thanked the partners, saying, "We trust that you will help us develop a better school."

years, earning the school a designation of "distinguished." A local pizza parlor donated pizza and chicken wings for a party celebrating the accomplishment.

Boston stopped by the local branch of Washington Mutual recently and introduced himself to the assistant manager, Julian Rigby. Bank employees are going to teach Peachcrest

students about saving and investing money. "I was very appreciative of the offer" to help at the school, Rigby said. He places copies of the school's newsletter on the counter so bank customers can read about the school's successes.

David Schuttgen, president of the Organization of Dekalb Educators, said some school principals complain that they don't have any business partners. "The people that ask the most get the most," Schuttgen said. "[Boston] isn't afraid to ask."

As a result, the owner of a trophy business supplies the school with awards for students and teachers. Another local business makes sure the school's clinic has the supplies it needs. And another provides free Japanese and sign language classes for students.

Last year, the school had just one business partner; now it has 15.

Several nonprofit organizations help the school with books, programs such as the mother-son social and incentives for children. Homeowners associations are also active at Peachcrest.

In a recent ceremony recognizing the school's business and community partners, fifth-grader An Vu gave a speech. "We are proud that you are our partners in education," he said. "We want you to know that we will achieve our goals. We trust that you will help us develop a better school."



BECKY STEIN / Special
All Irvin (from left) from the Reach Them 2 Teach Them Foundation, Henry Morris from the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club, and Julian Riggsby from Washington Mutual Bank listen during a ceremony last week at Peachcrest Elementary honoring the school's business and community partners. Last year, the school had just one business partner; now it has 15.

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Peachcrest Plants Trees

Ramariez Turner, left, and Kenneth Durden, right, students at Peachcrest Elementary School are assisted by Forest Ranger Dale Higdon in planting a tree as part of the "Let's Get Growing America" program. The program has a goal of planting 200,000 trees in the north Georgia area. Students from many DeKalb schools are planting trees at the Environmental Center near Panthersville Stadium as part of the program.