

Group Effort

Big Seven Association Assists Community in Countless Ways



LEFT TO RIGHT (FRONT) DEWAYNE EUBANKS, THOMAS WILLIAMS (CENTER) MARK LOTT, DAVID KENNER, JAMES WALLACE (BACK) BEN CARR JR., HORACE SANDERS

By Michelle Greenlee Harris

Seven might not seem like a large number, but to the people in Barnwell County the Big Seven Association is larger than life. The association began in 1989 when seven softball coaches and team managers put down their gloves and picked up the cause of bettering the lives of those in need in Barnwell County. “We were starting to feel some aches and pains when we played ball anyway,” laughs association president James Wallace, “but we also wanted to do something to touch the lives of people.” They started with young people. They stepped down from managing those on the ball fields to cutting the grass on the diamonds so young men would have a place to play. Wallace says that, many times, simple things made the biggest difference. “We started having cookouts every Saturday as soon as the kids got out of school and we would chaperone 25 to 30 kids from

(age) 1 to 13 and just let them have fun.” Wallace adds that they hired DJs and hosted teen parties as well. “We didn’t want to leave anybody out,” he insists.

Scholarship Recipients Laud Organization

Their support of young people eventually grew into scholarships for high school seniors from the towns of Barnwell, Blackville and Williston. Da’koyoia Bailey learned about the scholarship from a friend of the family who is now part of the association. She was awarded \$1,000 after writing an essay about her goals — which included becoming a nurse. She is now a nursing major at the University of South Carolina-Aiken and has nothing but praise for the Big Seven Association. “I used the money to buy books my freshman year and it was a great help, and even now the

association members are still willing to help,” she says. Craig Williams, who received a scholarship in 2004, echoes those accolades. “I just want to tell the Big Seven thank you again. The scholarship meant a lot to me then and it still does.” The mass communications major adds, “I encourage them to just keep doing what they are doing.”

Big Bucks From James Brown

What they are doing is working hard. They cover the expenses for all of their projects through fundraisers including car washes and doughnut sales. The group’s largest single donor has been soul singer and Barnwell County native James Brown. “He wanted to do something special for the people in this area and he wrote us a \$2,500 check when we started giving away scholarships,” recalls Wallace. Brown contributed every year until he died. But celebrities aren’t the only ones to support the group. When association members solicit donations in front of local grocery stores during their food drives in November, people readily hand them canned goods, cash, even gift

love them. “My wife isn’t always happy about how much time I spend away from home,” he chuckles, “but in the end she and the other wives always support what we do.”

Helping Seniors Tops President’s List

Members of the association acknowledge the wives’ sacrifices at their banquets and awards ceremonies. Showing appreciation is important to association members. “That’s why we host banquets to recognize schoolteachers, community leaders and our senior citizens: to show them that we care,” says James Wallace. No other activity touches his heart more than the food program for senior citizens. “Out of everything that we have done, that tops the list for me. People cried and hugged us when we brought the bags to their houses,” he says. The Big Seven collects 15,000 to 20,000 pounds of food each November, at first giving the bags away to anyone in the community. “Then they called me,” says Elise Myers, who retired after 31 years of working with

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certificates that they can raffle off to raise more money. “That’s because people trust them,” says S.C. Rep. Lonnie Hosey. “People know that anything they give the Big Seven will be used to better the community,” he says.

‘A Special Kind of Man’

People trust the Big Seven because they know the organization. Usually they know the members because they serve on other boards or committees with them. Almost all the members of the group hold full-time jobs and elected offices or leadership positions in their churches, political parties or communities. David Kenner is a full-time electrician in addition to serving on the Barnwell County Council and being a faithful member of the Big Seven for almost 10 years. “We all do that,” says Kenner, referring to how he typically goes from a 10-hour shift to a County Council meeting, then to a lodge meeting before going home to plan another fundraiser or event for the Big Seven. “My personal time is between 11 at night and 1 a.m.,” he says. He readily admits it takes a special kind of man to be a part of the Big Seven, and it takes special women to

the elderly and disabled. “They asked if I could locate people who were really in need but couldn’t come on their own to get the food. I had a whole list of people. I know of senior citizens who only get \$10 a month in food stamps and their families don’t help them out,” says Myers. She says when her seniors see her now they always thank her for sending the Big Seven to them, and not just because of the food. “They always tell me that the men were so nice and sat and talked to them and even put the food away for them,” she beams.

‘Striving to Do More’

That has become the trademark of the Big Seven Association: community service delivered with love. As the only original member of the group, James Wallace knows that from the beginning, the Big Seven always wanted to produce positive results for those in need. “Even now, we are always pushing, always striving to do more,” he says. Lonnie Hosey exclaims, “The Big Seven is something special and they will be around for a long time.” Many people in Barnwell County certainly hope so. ■