

Wallace-Gregg receives free violins for entire third grade

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By Shireese Bell

Third-grade students at Wallace-Gregg Elementary School were given free violins to enhance their learning opportunities, thanks to a donation from several local sponsors.

Students received the violins and instructional materials needed to start the four-year project during a ceremony Thursday at the school.



Joan Billheimer, community development officer for First Reliance Bank, approached the district about the project and helped secure funding from local businesses.

“I became interested in this project for our local students when I saw a “60 Minutes” segment on The Strings of Soweto,” Billheimer said in a press release. “After seeing the television program, I knew I wanted to start a similar project in Florence.”

“Hopefully, the third graders at Wallace-Gregg Elementary will experience the joy and excitement of music,” she said. “It would really be exciting if we could provide violins for all third graders in our school district.”

Honda of South Carolina; Jill Heiden, vice president of Global Human Resources with ESAB Welding & Cutting Products; and the Iota Mu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority donated funds to help with the project.

“Honda of South Carolina is proud to support the violin project at Wallace-Gregg Elementary School,” Jeff Helton, senior manager of human resources for Honda, said in a press release. “As a supporter of education, youth and the arts, this is a great opportunity to instill an appreciation for music and, hopefully, inspire some to take this to the next level with regard to the performing arts.”

Heiden said her organization was happy to be able to bring the project to the school. “Creating cultural awareness through music, coupled with wisdom and insight, offers the development of a blended education for our next generation,” she said. “Therefore, we are happy to be associated with this project.” Each student will receive a violin and violin

lessons from Megerlyn Davis, the school's music teacher.

"This is a musical opportunity of a lifetime for the third grade students at Wallace-Gregg Elementary School," Davis said in a press release. "Through this instruction, the students will gain the necessary skills of musicianship needed to play the violin."

Students who complete the project will be able to keep the instruments.

Davis, a member of Zeta Phi Beta, and Laura Greenway, performing arts coordinator for Florence School District 1, will develop the curriculum and tracking system to determine the success of the project.

Greenway said the purpose of the project is to offer hands-on experience in instrumental music that is designed to enhance critical thinking; develop musical skills using a variety of learning styles; and show educational and personal gains in all areas of instruction.

Wallace-Gregg principal Gloria Muldrow said she is excited about the upcoming project.

"I think it is just a great experience," Muldrow said. "They're going to learn different avenues of music just by playing the violin."

"It's going to familiarize them with another area of the arts," she said. "You never know, they might continue the violin when they get to the middle school and the high school."