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Project Payback Program helps juvenile offenders

By Brenda Mueller
Special to the Chronicle

We are excited to update our community on the continued success of The Leon County Project Payback program, a cooperative partnership between local business, McKenzie Markets/Go Clean Car Wash, The Henry and Rilla White Youth Foundation Inc., a local not-for-profit organization that works with juvenile offenders, and The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Circuit Two Office. This program would not be possible without the unwavering support of business owners Dan and Martha McKenzie and all of the hard-working staff at McKenzie Markets/Go Clean Car Wash who keep folks wanting to come back again and again.

The McKenzies were recognized at the Leon County Juvenile Justice Council Banquet in March 2011 for their dedication to our community and youth by agreeing to provide funding to support this program and most recently were presented with an award from The Henry and Rilla White Youth Foundation Inc. at a Leon County Juvenile Justice Council meeting.

The purpose of The Leon County Project Payback Program is to monitor and enforce

restitution owed to victims of juvenile crime. Restitution is the act of an offender paying a victim monetary compensation for a loss or injury resulting directly or indirectly from a crime. Restitution is often ordered by the juvenile court or state attorney after the offender has been found to be responsible for a crime that caused financial damage or loss to a victim. However, in many cases victims never receive retribution due to the young age of the offenders who commit the offense.

Project Payback gives juvenile offenders who want to get back on the right track the opportunity to do so by completing community restitution service hours at an approved work site to earn money to repay their victims. Each approved and verified hour equals one hour of minimum service pay, which in turn is used to repay victims. McKenzie Markets/Go Clean Car Wash proudly donates \$1 from every \$12 car wash purchased between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. to the program.

These donations provide ongoing funding

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for the Leon County Project Payback program. All proceeds collected are used to compensate victims of juvenile crime. Since the program began in March 2011, more than \$19,000 has been donated to the Project Payback program by the McKenzies' Go Clean Car Wash.

This has proven to be a win-win partnership in many ways. Juvenile offenders are held accountable, victims are reimbursed for their financial loss, and McKenzie Markets/Go Clean Car Wash gains recognition for being a leader in the community.

Since inception, projects have included cleaning up litter on the streets, at local cemeteries and in the Silver Lake Park area, helping FSU with its Chuck It For Charity program, serving lunch to residents at the Hope Community Center every Wednesday, assisting The One Voice Coalition with the Springfield and Southside March/Rally, working at the Back To School Outreach activity at Jake Gaither Community Center, helping with outside cleanup at The Family Worship and Praise Center and Living Stones International (gender specific project) and working at the St. Louis Catholic Church garage sale.

Since implementation in March 2011, The Leon County Project Payback Program has had 61 youth and several staff members work at various projects.

More than \$8,000 has been earned by youth to pay back their victims. In fact, seven youth in the Intensive Delinquency Diversion Services (IDDS) and/or Probation

(DJJ) programs have been able to earn and pay off all of their restitution requirements.

We hope you will join us in our efforts to continue to make this program one-of-a-kind. A special Spring Breakwork week is currently being planned.

So if you have a project for our youth to participate in or would like to sponsor lunch one day, please let us know. Together we are all making a difference in these young peoples' lives by giving them the opportunity to get back on the right track.

For more information on The Leon County Project Payback Program or to find out how you can help, contact Brenda Mueller at 850-922-8375 ext. 36 or at bmuelle@hrwhite.org. Hope to see you soon at Go Clean Car Wash, located at 2315 Capital Circle Northeast.

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