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## **Pittsburgh school opens hearts to Murray Henderson Middle School**

When students at Murray Henderson Middle School in Algiers were called to an assembly on a recent morning, none of them knew what to expect.

That's when Principal Beverly Johnson-Jelks, with microphone in hand at the Jan. 9 assembly, announced that Dorseyville Middle School in Pittsburgh had adopted Murray Henderson in an effort to aid students still recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

"They have truly opened their hearts and their purse strings," Johnson-Jelks said of the school, located 1,000 miles away.

Dorseyville's students raised just over \$7,300, and donated the entire sum to the students of Murray Henderson. "It was a true blessing," Johnson-Jelks said.

Most of the money will be used to buy Henderson students warm winter coats and school uniforms.

Students at Dorseyville came up with the adoption idea almost accidentally last year after they had the National Character Education Foundation (NCEF) All Pro Action Team Speaker and New Orleans native Randy Thornton speak at their school. Randy Thornton, a native of New Orleans and former Denver Broncos NFL football player, spoke to Dorseyville students back in May and told them about the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. The students immediately wanted to help. Working with The NCEF, Thornton contacted Henderson Elementary and the National Character Education Foundation (NCEF) then spearheaded the adoption.

The NCEF organized getting information about the area and the school and once the Dorseyville students received the pictures, they were shocked to see the condition of New Orleans and the schools in the area.

"We hadn't been hearing about the hurricane on TV anymore," said Rox Serrao, principal of Dorseyville Middle School. "But when we heard what Thornton had to say, we knew we had to do something."

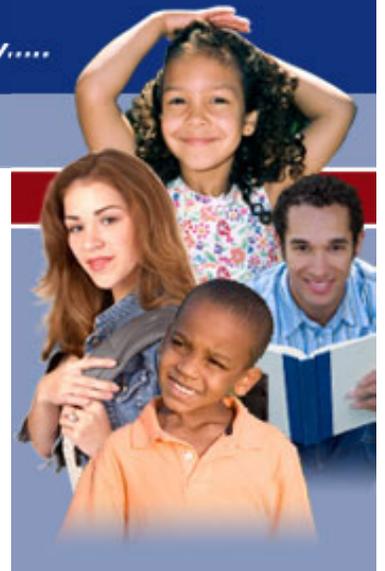
Thornton suggested Henderson would be a good school to adopt.

The students sprang into action. Members of Dorseyville's Student Council organized a myriad of events that were held school wide to help raise money for Murray Henderson.

"We had a bake sale; we sold sodas; the Spanish club sold quesadillas; we had a Pie-A-Teacher booth, to throw whip cream pies at teachers; the whole school pitched in," said Ally Damico, eighth-grade treasurer.

Perhaps the biggest money maker for the students came in the form of a telethon they hosted.

"We showed pictures of what happened in New Orleans and the phones



"We showed pictures of what happened in New Orleans and the phones started ringing", said eighth-grade President Ethan Diamond

Students at Henderson made a wish list that was presented to Jelks; It showed a need for the basics. "Many students could not afford uniforms. That's a concern," Johnson-Jelks said.

Most upsetting to the principal, however, was the most recent cold snap to hit the New Orleans Area. "I was simply shocked to see how many of these kids came to school with no coat or even a jacket," she said.

"Now we can get the stuff that we really need for the school," said Nicholas Weber, an eighth grader at Henderson.

Dorseyville student Ally Damico said, "It is important not to forget what happened."

At the end of the month, Dorseyville will send a truck to New Orleans filled with the remaining items on the Henderson wish list.

Serrao said, "We will be collecting items from students' parents as well as anyone else who wants to donate. We're getting the whole community involved."

Johnson-Jelks said, "It really just feels too good to be true." Ms. Johnson-Jelks- says although Henderson is located in Algiers, which is on the West Bank of New Orleans, more than half of her students live on the city East Bank, where much of the devastation occurred.

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