

OPERATION SHOESTRING

By Teaching Children and Inspiring Families, Operation Shoestring Ensures We All Rise Together

THE NEWSLETTER OF OPERATION SHOESTRING

WINTER 2010

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Operation Shoestring Launches New Web Site and Tag Line

Operation Shoestring is pleased to launch a web site that truly reflects our mission and our commitment to a better Jackson. Thanks to the generosity and talents of Chris Ray, a Shoestring board member and CEO of the Ramey Agency, Operation Shoestring was able to develop a first-class site. At the site, you can learn about our history, keep up with the latest Operation Shoestring developments, see pictures of the children we serve and support our organization with your financial donations.

“We are thankful that we could develop such a high-tech web site at such a reasonable cost,” said Robert Langford, executive director. “Our staff works very hard to be good stewards of the funds that we receive from our donors and we want to ensure that the highest percentage possible goes

directly to services. Because of the Ramey Agency, we now have a web site that will enable us to better explain our mission to potential donors and better communicate our message of Jackson rising.”

Over the past year, the Operation Shoestring board and staff have worked to develop a better communication strategy. “We found that it was difficult to explain our mission succinctly,” said Langford. Working with our board members and friends from the community, we developed a tag line that reflects our mission: *by teaching children and inspiring families, Operation Shoestring ensures that we all rise together.* It helps communicate our belief that when the children in our neighborhood receive a good education and learn to set their sights high, all of Jackson will benefit.”

Shoestring Enjoys a Banner 2009



We all rise together. This message is at the core of Operation Shoestring's mission and programs. What does it mean? Quite simply, when the children of central Jackson are safe, nurtured and empowered to take advantage of a bright future, all of Jackson rises. When the families in Shoestring's focus area are strong and thriving, all of Jackson rises. Our new tag line—*by teaching children and inspiring families, Operation Shoestring ensures that we all rise together*—affirms our belief that every child in Jackson should have the same access to a promising future, and that all the families of our city should have the same opportunity and means to improve and succeed.

Despite the rough economy in 2009, Operation Shoestring enjoyed one of its most successful years in recent memory. Both our fund raising efforts and our delivery of services were great successes, and we can thank loyal supporters like you for making that a reality. Because of this support, Operation Shoestring was able to provide:

- Daily after school academic enrichment and character development for 120 elementary school students.
- Workshops for 450 families that included topics as wide-ranging as preventing lead poisoning of infants to financial planning and interviewing skills for adults.
- A family initiative that is teaching a love of reading to 25 neighborhood families.
- Summer programming – including horseback riding, cheer leading, dance, academic boosters, and much more – for 75 children. In addition, these children were able to receive a good breakfast, lunch and snacks every day for the duration of our summer programs.
- Spanish lessons for 63 students and their families.
- Summer jobs and comprehensive professional training for honor students at Lanier. (Perhaps you saw the outstanding coverage we received in The Clarion-Ledger...)
- Visual and performing arts instruction for 75 students.
- Critical thinking instructions – including chess lessons – for 50 children.
- 2,160 boxes of food to needy families; and much more.

We look forward to another outstanding year as we work with our community partners to ensure that we all rise.

Conversation About Community a Success



Jim Barksdale makes a point during September's "Conversation About Community." Seated to his right is Oleta Fitzgerald. To his left are Rev. Luther Ott and Dr. Aaron Shirley.

On September 17, 2009, more than 400 people filled the Trustmark Ballroom at the Jackson Convention Complex to attend Operation Shoestring's "Conversation About Community." In keeping with tradition, the evening was not the typical wine and cheese fund raiser. Instead, the audience was treated to a thought-provoking conversation moderated by Donna Ladd of the *Jackson Free Press*. This year's dinner featured a panel of four local leaders who are profoundly important to Jackson's future. Our panelists were Jim Barksdale of the Barksdale Reading Institute, Oleta Fitzgerald of the Children's Defense Fund, the Rev. Luther Ott of the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson, and Dr. Aaron Shirley of the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation. The panel discussed issues of race and education and noted that the work of Operation Shoestring is critical to the improvement of Jackson.

Jim Barksdale observed that in his many years of travel and speaking engagements, that he had never attended a more racially-diverse event than the "Conversation About Community." He said that he was encouraged by the commitment of so many people from so many walks of life who were committed to transforming Jackson. Dr. Shirley explained the devastating effects of teenage pregnancy on the health and well-being of the women and children in Jackson, and he exhorted the audience to support efforts to reduce the rate of unwed teen mothers.

Continued next page.



Participants from the YEP program share some of their experiences with the audience.

"Conversation" Continued:

Oleta Fitzgerald explained that poverty drives so many of the problems that engulf some children in Jackson. She urged the community to place emphasis on education and drew applause when she declared that the state must not cut funding for education.

Rev. Ott noted that religious leaders and agencies must have hard conversations about race and about changing the hearts and minds of congregations. "Obviously, it matters, and obviously, we have to talk

about race," said Ott. He also noted that Mississippi has "a church on every corner" and that the opportunity to affect change and to bring children up from poverty is very real.

Operation Shoestring thanks our panelists, sponsors and attendees for making this year's "Conversation About Community" such a unique – and powerful – event.

Youth Employment Garners Attention

Operation Shoestring has educated children and inspired families for more than 40 years. Much of our daily work focuses on the 120-plus elementary school students who come to us each afternoon from Galloway Elementary School. Because of the innovation and generosity of several board members and local businesses, we recently were able to expand our programming to local teenagers. Through the Youth Employment Program (YEP), which was held this past summer, Operation Shoestring trained Lanier High School honor students to be top-notch professionals. These honor students learned the importance of financial and time management, they learned the appropriate attire for a professional workplace and the expectations an employer has for employees. After their training, these students worked at numerous Jackson-area organizations and businesses, including University Medical Center, Barksdale Cadillac and *The Clarion-Ledger*.



Caleb Robinson and Kalissia Veal, two YEP program participants, featured in *The Clarion-Ledger*.

Over the course of the summer, these outstanding students gained valuable work experience. More than that, they realized that they could – and should – set their sights very high. The YEP students discovered that an enriching career shouldn't be a dream. They learned what it takes to make it a reality.

We were proud of the results of the program and of the press coverage it received. *The Clarion-Ledger* ran a story last fall that highlighted Caleb Robinson and Kalissia Veal, and their work at the newspaper. In January, *The Clarion-Ledger* also profiled Tegi Jenkins, who worked at University Medical Center through the YEP program.

For links to all three Clarion-Ledger articles, go to OperationShoestring.org

A Motivated Young Man

Last month, we sent an e-mail to our supporters that highlighted Sentriz, one of our Project KIDS participants. We've reprinted it here because of all the feedback we received. To add your e-mail address to our database – and to receive regular e-mail updates on our work – go to our web site and click "E-mail Sign Up" on the home page.

Our staff held an informal Christmas luncheon recently, and we were reflecting on the past year and the good things happening at Operation Shoestring. One of our program directors told us a great story that I wanted to share with you.

An elementary school student named Sentriz was part of our Project KIDS after-school program last academic year. Because of some transition in his home life, Sentriz didn't officially register for Project KIDS when this 2009-2010 school year began last August. But he didn't want to miss a day at Shoestring, so he walked to our building after the first day of school at

Galloway Elementary School. When our project coordinator noticed that we had one child too many, she approached Sentriz and said that she'd love to have him join us, but that his parents had to register him.

To her surprise, nine-year-old Sentriz was back at Shoestring that same afternoon! He had walked home just around the corner, gotten his mother and walked her right back to our Project KIDS after-school classrooms so that he could immediately get back to his school work and to the learning opportunities that we offer! He obviously wanted to be a part of the Spanish classes, arts instruction, academic reinforcement and character education that Shoestring's Project KIDS ministry provides every school day and most of the summer.

We think Sentriz's story illustrates perfectly the drive that so many of our children display and the value that they place on the nurturing and support they receive at Operation Shoestring.

DIRECTOR'S CORNER:

The Parable of the River...and You

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and life in the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly swam out to save the baby from drowning. The next day this same villager noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were seen caught in the turbulent current. And then eight, then more, and still more!

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watchtowers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased. The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were now snatching many children each day. While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed, the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis. One day, however, someone raised the question, "But where are all these babies coming from? Let's organize a team to head upstream to find-out who's throwing all of these babies into the river in the first place!"

The community elders countered: "And if we go upstream who will operate the rescue operations? We need every concerned person here!"

"But don't you see," cried the one lone voice," if we find out who is throwing them in, we can stop the problem and no babies will drown! By going upstream we can eliminate the cause of the problem!"

You probably know the story. I first heard this parable a few years ago when William Raspberry, noted Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post columnist and native Mississippian, spoke to a group of business and community leaders when he came to town to keynote Operation Shoestring's annual dinner. His message was that we need to invest early on in the lives of children and young families so that we keep them from being thrown in the river. He also stressed that it's both the responsibility of individual families AND the greater community to make sure kids aren't thrown in the river.

Operation Shoestring realizes that babies (and young people, families, adults, seniors, etc.) do sometimes end up caught in life's treacherous currents, and that we must work to pull them safely to shore. But our focus is more on going upriver to try to teach those babies to swim or to avoid the water as best they can. Of course, we don't take that on by ourselves. This work involves the whole community—our target families, congregations, schools, business, other non-profits, the public sector, and lots and lots of individuals like you. We definitely take the lead in some service areas (after-school programming, dropout prevention), but we very clearly realize that this necessary, wonderful, frustrating, empowering work and ministry takes ALL of us.

As this newsletter illustrates, it takes everyone in our community working together to keep our kids "out of the water." And in these incredibly tough economic times, I'm encouraged that our community is indeed coming together to do this work. But, we're not there yet. It will continue to take your time, financial support and interest in Operation Shoestring's work and ministry to transform our community, one child and one family at a time.

Faithfully yours,



Robert Langford



Images from Operation Shoestring in 2009

We have included several images that illustrate the work we're doing for the children and families in our community. Some of these pictures were taken at our building on Bailey Avenue and others were taken in surrounding areas by volunteers who provided our kids with unique learning opportunities, such as dancing, piano lessons, and horseback riding!





To learn more about Operation Shoestring and to stay up to date on our programs, please visit www.operationshoestring.org. For more information about supporting our efforts or getting involved, please e-mail woverstreet@operationshoestring.org

Look for more information soon about our annual music event, *Operation Spring Fling*.

www.OperationsShoestring.org



A United Way Agency

An affiliate of the ChildFund International

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