

**By TERESA HATCHER** “It takes a village” is a phrase that has many meanings.

It can refer to raising children, getting a job, or in the case of last Saturday’s School Store at College Hills Church, putting many, many details together in an effort to serve those in our community in need.

Thanks to Jim and Annabelle Robinson, two valuable members of our community, the School Store, a project initiated by the couple, was a huge success. The event was made possible by some 300 volunteers who unselfishly gave of their time to ensure that the annual program would run smoothly, and run smoothly it did without a hitch thanks to the “Village” at College Hills.

The School Store is about getting young students prepared for school. These are students from within the county who need an extra boost, a helping hand for them and their parents.

Some of those served were in line and standing outside the church for free backpacks, school supplies and clothing as early as 1 a.m., Saturday. By 7:30, when most of the army of volunteers arrived, the line of more than 1,600 people, including kids and parents, had wrapped around the building. The parking lot was full.

Everyone waited patiently. And, even though the sky darkened and storms threatened, the quick thinking of those registering the moms, dads and children in line hurried everyone inside to get their numbers and wait their turn.

Inside the church’s auditorium more than 415 families were on alert waiting to hear their respective numbers indicating that it was their time to begin moving through various stations beginning first with backpacks.

After backpacks the next stop was actually optional. Each family was extended an opportunity, if they so chose, to have someone pray for them. The majority asked for prayers, which could be

for a specific need or just a generic wish for a safe school year. And then it was on to stops for classroom supplies ranging from crayons to paper and then a final visit to the sector for clothing giveaway.

To no one's surprise the numbers representing those in need were much higher this year than last.

Many in our community continue to struggle in an ailing economy. Many are desperate. Many are looking steadfastly for work and many are just trying to make ends meet as best they can.

Those who came to the School Store were appreciative. They cried. They smiled. And they said "thank you" in very special ways.

As has been taught and repeated over and over and sometimes to a deaf ear, helping others gives you a feeling money can't buy.

We've all been in need of help at some time in our lives. Some more than others.

When someone helps you, you are not likely to forget.

When you see the emotions from those receiving help as we saw Saturday, you have to wonder how many more are out there in our community that we didn't reach. How many didn't know about the School Store project? How many couldn't find transportation to get there? How many didn't have parents who care whether or not they were prepared for school? And how many didn't really believe it was free, no strings attached?

Thank you, thank you to all the volunteers that got there early and left late.

Thank you, Jim and Annabelle for another great year for the School Store program. And, thank you for letting me be a part of a great day.