



Thursday, December 11, 2008

## Connecting Henry, Noah's Ark, get help from Divas

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Photo by Renee Richardson - The Divas of Henry County presented Diane Smith (left), assistant to Noah's Ark director Jama Hedgecoth, with a check for \$1,372. The Divas also donated funds to Connecting Henry.

By Jason A. Smith

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A unique group of women in Henry County have combined their efforts to benefit two local organizations for the holidays.

The Divas of Henry County awarded funds recently to Connecting Henry and Noah's Ark Animal Rehabilitation Center and Children's Care Home.

"We decided instead of giving each other presents, we'd start saving money and making contributions at Christmas to charities that needed them," explains Doris English is a member of the Divas.

"We all have more than we need. We decided what we really wanted to do, was to give to someone else," said the 62-year-old McDonough woman.

Once the Divas of Henry County, all retirees, decided they wanted to do something different this year with their free time during the holidays, they began collecting funds for the non-profit agencies.

In September, the group sold raffle tickets for a \$100 gift certificate to Season's Bistro in McDonough. Additional funds came from a yard sale. The Divas raised over \$1,700 and donated \$1,372 to Noah's Ark.



Photo by Renee Richardson - The donated funds from the Divas of Henry County go toward the daily care of more than 1,200 animals which are housed at Noah's Ark.

Diane Smith, assistant to Noah's Ark director Jama Hedgecoth, accepted a check on behalf of the facility in Locust Grove. She says the Divas initially displayed interest in making a donation earlier this year. "They contacted us in the fall, came out and toured Noah's Ark..." says Smith. "They asked us questions, and decided we were one of the organizations they wanted to support."

She adds the assistance of the Divas is an important component in allowing the staff of Noah's Ark to care for animals and children. Smith said she and her co-workers were "inspired" by the group's efforts. "It is groups like [the Divas] that make Noah's Ark possible," she said. "Charity work is hard work. It's wonderful to get huge support from huge groups, but it's all the little things that add up."

The Divas have designated funds to go toward the daily care of more than 1,200 animals at Noah's Ark.

Denese Rodgers, executive director of Connecting Henry, gladly accepted her organization's \$360 check from the Divas. She has noticed the "incredible bond" the ladies in the group have with the community.

"Each one of them is a voice in a dozen different ways, that I would not normally be able to have access to," says Rodgers. "They're all advocates for [Connecting Henry], and you can't put a price on that when you're dealing with volunteers. I can't wait until I've earned enough grace to be one of the Divas."

According to Rodgers, volunteer efforts like those undertaken by the Divas have become increasingly common in Henry in recent years. Part of that, she adds, can be attributed to the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "That was a catalyst year, where we began seeing [groups] coming together to try to work on common issues in our community."

Raffle winner Laura Henderson, of McDonough, was present for the Divas' check presentations. Henderson, 42, says she first learned

about the ladies through her mother, Shirley Sheppard. "My mom knows the Divas through her senior fitness program, and talks highly of them."

Henderson says although she has never dealt directly with Connecting Henry, she "loves" Noah's Ark and has taken animals to the facility in the past. She said she and her family took advantage of the Divas' giving spirit by going to dinner at Season's together.

One of the Divas, Doris English, says the group is grateful for the support they have enjoyed from local residents. She said the "exhausted" ladies plan to regroup in January, to plan their next project.

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