

Governor gives local kids a pep talk

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Scott touts food program, encourages students during visit to Turie T. Small

BY ANDREAS BUTLER, DAYTONA TIMES

Florida Gov. Rick Scott stressed the importance of education and touted the area's Food Brings Hope program on Tuesday during a visit to Turie T. Small Elementary School in Daytona Beach.



Gov. Rick Scott greets students on Tuesday at Turie T. Small Elementary School.
(ANDREAS BUTLER/DAYTONA TIMES)

"Only in the United States can you become anything that you want to be – whether a governor, the president, a CEO or an astronaut, but it all starts with education," Scott said at the school, which is in a predominantly Black neighborhood in the city.

The governor was at the school to support the Food Brings Hope program, which helps provide food for economically disadvantaged students. The program seeks to end hunger in the area for all school-age children.

"This is a great program and these kids are our future. If they can get a great education, they can achieve whatever they want," Scott said to several hundred students from around the county and invited guests who packed Turie T. Small's auditorium.

Started in 2007

Food Brings Hope is a non-profit organization started six years ago by Forough B. Hosseini, who serves as the chair of its board of directors. Hosseini is the executive vice president of Information Technology at ICI Homes.

It is an initiative of the Community Foundation of Volusia & Flagler, a division of United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc.

"We started at Hinson Middle in 2007. I had my two daughters in the program to see how it would go. The program has grown. We realized that in Volusia County there are many homeless and economically disadvantaged kids that don't have enough to eat and it affects them academically," Hosseini said.



Forough Hosseini, left, created the Food Brings Hope program. She is shown with her husband, Mori Hosseini, right. Dr. Earl Johnson, principal of Turie T. Small Elementary, is in the center.
(ANDREAS BUTLER/DAYTONA TIMES)

"Every year, I ask powerful speakers to come and talk to the children on behalf of the program. We want to teach kids to work hard and stay in school so that they can become successful."

Free tutoring

In addition to meals, the program provides free after-school tutoring and activities along with field trips to cultural and sporting events.

Local schools participating include Turie T. Small and Westside Elementary (Daytona Beach), Osceola Elementary (Ormond Beach), Campbell Middle school (Daytona Beach), Hinson Middle School (Daytona Beach), New Smyrna Beach Middle School, Deltona High School, New Smyrna High School and Spruce Creek High (Port Orange).

Students from some of the elementary and middle schools attended the event.

Praise for school

The benefits of the program have been seen at schools like Turie T. Small.

Dr. Earl Johnson, Turie T. Small's principal, said 95.7 percent of the students at the school receive free or reduced lunch.

"Our school has made the highest gains in science in testing. The program itself reiterates the importance of education. Thanks to the Hosseinis, the program has done a lot in Volusia County by providing a way for our kids to get the best education that they can get."

The governor also praised Turie T. Small and the students for their accomplishments.

"Everyone around the state knows about you and what you have achieved and we are all proud of you," he stated.

Statewide problem

Scott noted that more funding is needed for programs that fight hunger.

"Last year, we increased state funding by one billion dollars. My goal is to increase state funding for grades K through 12. We need to increase state funding to get families what they are asking for," he said. "People want jobs and a good education for their children but don't want the cost of living to go up."

Hosseini is doing her part to fight the hunger problem locally through the program.

"The economic condition over the past six years contributes to it. We started with 900 students and now have 2,026. If you can fill the kids' tummies, you can help them be successful academically and in life. We have too many kids that only get free lunch and breakfast, then go home and have nothing," Hosseini explained.

"They are often hungry during long weekends and holiday breaks. They worry about it. We want to take that away so that they can concentrate. We do 40 pounds of food bags with Halifax Urban Ministries once a week at some of our schools. We want to take that one issue out of their minds."

Children inspired

Some of the children were encouraged by the governor's visit.

Fifth-grader Alaiz'a Riley said, "It was good that he came to speak to us. He encouraged us to do great things and encourage our dreams. As for the food program, I believe that it's a good thing because everyone cannot afford food whether at school or outside of school."

Cory Jackson, also a fifth-grader, added, "It was pretty cool that the governor came to speak to us today. Not everyone can say that the governor was at their school."

The food program is a good thing. I get free lunch and I know it helps people in need."

For more information on the Food Brings Hope program, visit www.foodbringshope.org.