

Thousands of hands reach out

Teresa Williams

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— THOMASVILLE — Helping hands were not in short supply Saturday as 1,430 volunteers participated in the sixth annual Hands On Thomas County Day.

Volunteers worked at 32 sites spread throughout the city and county, including a Habitat for Humanity house, the Salvation Army Needham House, the Thomasville-Thomas County Humane Society, two historic cemeteries and a new pocket park.

“Most projects were finished,” Casey Dyksterhouse, executive director, said Monday. “I’m always amazed at the way our community embraces things like this and comes out to help.

“I think, too, with everything going on with the economy, people realize now more than ever they need to get out and help non-profits, who help those less fortunate do more with less.”

HOTC Day is part of Hands On Georgia Week, which kicked off Saturday and runs through Oct. 3.

Hands On Georgia is the first statewide network in the nation dedicated to volunteer service and civic engagement, according to an event news release. It acts as a central organizing body for Georgia’s 159 counties to mobilize citizens to address community needs.

“It is truly amazing to see thousands of Georgians volunteer their time to support their local communities,” Laurie Grant Nichols, chief executive officer of Hands On Georgia, said in a news release.

Ken Carter and other Lowe’s representatives and volunteers helped at Needham House. Lowe’s has partnered with HOTC for several years by providing experts and materials to project sites.

“We’ve had a good morning,” he said. “We’ve worked on the playground equipment, done some landscaping and other things to help fix up the place.”

Volunteer Charles Balfour worked with a group of youths from Vashti behind a local Habitat for Humanity House, clearing underbrush. He said it was a hot job but one he was happy to do to help improve others’ lives.

Dyksterhouse was “thrilled” with the youth turnout — more than 500 volunteers.

“It was the largest group of youths or teens I’ve ever seen,” she said.

Several Cub Scout packs and dens worked at a food drop for Second Harvest, helping fill boxes with food for locals in need. Other youths could be found scrubbing headstones, trimming underbrush, painting walls or a variety of improvement activities.

Hayley Hurst, 14, volunteers at the humane society and chose to make it her site on Saturday. She helped paint the walls of one of the shelter’s buildings.

“I like volunteering and helping animals,” Hurst said. “Today, everyone has been working together to help others and it has been fun.”

Many volunteers were first-timers.

Jo Thomas, of Cairo, helped clean headstones in one of the city’s historic cemeteries.

“I’ve never done this but it has been nice so far,” she said. “I’m having a good time.”

Jim Compton helped plant shrubs and trees at the City of Thomasville’s pocket park, one of the largest sites.

“This is my first time volunteering at this event, but I think it is a great opportunity and cause. It is a good reason to get out of bed early on a Saturday morning.”

But, HOTC Day is not the only day people can volunteer, Dyksterhouse stressed. “It is great for people to come out on the day, but they can volunteer year-round. I don’t think everybody knows that. We are not just a once a year operation. I hope this event will encourage more volunteers to do so in the community on a regular basis.”

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