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8th Annual Epic End of Summer Bash rings the bell for charity galore; Hundreds of people visit Trail Head Park for free school supplies; Mobile Response Team start announced



Palms Medical Group sent many representatives for the day. They must have won the title for Best Summer Themed Group, complete with Hawaiian leis and all. Seen here (from left) are Alyssa Ottinger, 10, Angela Ottinger, Chesleigh Garner, 9, Amanda Garner, Theresa Grippo, Aidan Bryan, 4, Allyson Schmitz, Amanda Bryan, Kimberlee Kevitzke and Roberta Montgomery.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © July 28, 2019 at 3:39 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- "Saturday in the park, I think it was the 27th of July.

The 1972 song *Saturday in the Park* by the musical group *Chicago* for its 1972 album *Chicago V* (five) was written by Robert Lamm. It begins "Saturday in the park I think it was the Fourth of July. Saturday in the park I think it was the Fourth of July. People dancing, people laughing A man selling ice cream."

Saturday (July 27) in Trail Head Park in downtown Chiefland was a day in the park that was a tad different than the one Lamm sang about, nonetheless it was a great day for people to receive lots of free items -- especially school supplies and information.

The spirit of charity abounded again, having grown significantly in the past year as the result of a spark for improvement initiated by most recently former First United

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Methodist Church of Chiefland Pastor Alex Christian.

The Epic End of Summer Bash, now named the Back To School Bash, changed dramatically this year. It moved from the open field near First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, 707 N. Main St. (U.S. Highway 19).

Last year, it centered around the C. Doyle McCall Pavilion, which is located behind the church in the big field between the church and U.S. Alt. 27.

Pastor Christian this year planted the seed that moved the event from the church to the city's park, as well as his stated plan to work with another Chiefland pastor who has held a similar event for the past couple of years in that same park.

Initiated seven summers ago by former First United Methodist Church of Chiefland Pastor Terry Wines, this event was first considered as a replacement for Vacation Bible School as a community outreach mission back then.

Since then, the Rev. Richard "Rich" Quackenbush, who was serving as an interim pastor until Pastor Anthony "Tony" Rennett relocated to Chiefland from Canada with his wife Tina Rennett, served for one of these annual events, while being the pastor at First UMC Chiefland.

Pastor Wines and his wife Amelia Wines relocated to a United Methodist Church to the east of Chiefland. Then, Pastor Rennett and his wife Tina returned to Canada after serving at the church for at least a year.

Last year, Pastor Christian his wife Velma Christian were the pastoral leaders for the host church - First UMC of Chiefland.

Pastor Christian and his wife moved from Chiefland to serve at a United Methodist Church in Lake Placid.



First United Methodist Church of Chiefland Pastor Richard Blue Jr. experiences his first Back To School Bash, an event that has flourished, evolved and grown since it started eight years ago.

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Some of the hundreds of visitors to the park are seen here.

Pastor Richard Blue Jr. is the newest pastor at First UMC Chiefland, which during the past 14 years at least has a new pastor every year or two. He was on the grounds of Chiefland Trail Head Park. One of the sponsors other than the church mentioned a thought that the event is better received by it being not as connected with Christianity, because some people do not share those beliefs.

Sponsored this year the by First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, the Tri-County Community Resource Center (Partnership for Strong Families), the Florida Department of Health, the Tobacco Free Partnership of Levy County, Meridian Behavioral Health Care and countless other private and public interests, the event found its new location to have more shade, better parking and turned out to be a real winner – once again.

This year's Epic End of Summer Bash, like the predecessor bashes in years past, included hundreds of parents and children participating, with plenty of vendors and volunteers making sure everyone revels in the day and goes home with lots of free school supplies.

One report showed at least 700 backpacks being given away to school children.

This event is 100 percent free for participants. People accepted free food, free school supplies, as well as free backpacks and more.

Another free gift for everyone was information about services from the many helpful agencies which included staff workers and volunteers.

MRT Starts

Meridian Behavior Health Care Mobile Response Team (MRT) Manager Alesha Smith, who was joined at the event by Meridian Behavior Health Care Clinician Heather Pinner, distributed pamphlets showing information about the new MRT program.

The MRT Program, the pamphlet notes, is to help troubled young people, 25 years

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and younger, who are in Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Suwannee and Union counties whenever they are in need of crisis intervention services 24-hours-a-day, on any day or night.

The MRT Hotline number for young people to call when they need help is 1-800-330-5615.

The goal of the program is “... to lessen the trauma of crisis situations, particularly diverting individuals away from” emergency rooms and jails. As part of that goal, the MRT intends to stabilize the person in the most conducive setting possible.

During the initial crisis phase, a counselor with a master’s level counselor responds to the crisis location at any hour of the day or night. Meanwhile, a care coordinator establishes links to appropriate community resources.

According to the information shared with the public on Saturday, a Mobile Response Team from Meridian aims to

- * Respond to the site within 60 minutes of a crisis notification;
- * Follow up the next day with a tailored behavioral health crisis-oriented care plan;
- * Provide screening, standardized assessments and referral services;
- * Create safety plans to prevent future crises;
- * Include family members in decision-making and support processes

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Meridian Behavior Health Care Clinician Heather Pinner (left) and Meridian Behavior Health Care Mobile Response Team Manager Alesha Smith pose for a photo opportunity.

Florida Department of Health Educator Kyle Roberts (left) serves people in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Gilchrist and Dixie counties. He is seen here with Mark Johnson of the Florida Department of Health. Johnson is the Florida Department of Health Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator For Levy County and Gilchrist County. A for director of Levy County Emergency Management, Johnson is also a Planner III for the Florida Department of Health. And, beyond his normal job, he is a renowned multi-award-winning banjo player, and teacher, best known for his claw-hammer style of play, which he created.

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Moments before the start of the event, these four people agreed to pause for a photo opportunity. They all serve the public . They are (from left) Levy County Sheriff's Office School Resource Officer K. Ward, who was at Chiefland Elementary School for the 2018-19 School Year and is scheduled to be at CES 2019-20; Central Florida Electric Cooperative Safety Specialist A.D. Goodman (who is also on the board of the Tri-County Community Resources Center; Levy County Emergency Management Assistant Director David Peaton and of Tri-County Community Resources Center Manager Beverly Goodman.



Meridian Behavior Health Care Prevention Specialist Robert Wells and QuitDoc Community Health Advocate Kristina Zachry are two extremely active people who help people stay away from tobacco and other drugs, and to quit using them.

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Junie Burr is a volunteer for The Children's Table. Bill Brown is the founder of The Children's Table, which provides free food to people in several North Florida counties. Verna Brown, Bill's wife, and other volunteers from this organization were at the event as well.



People visit the Clyatt House learning Center's table to pick up items and get information.

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Hayden Henderson, a young volunteer, helps hand out hundreds of backpacks. This young man was focused on his job and performed it well, while even being able to take a few seconds out to answer a question from a journalist while striking a pose -- never breaking stride with his quick retrieval of specific colors of backpacks.

Kary Colson, an active member of First UMC Methodist Men as well as being a very active veteran, stands near a trailer full of backpacks as the LifeSouth Community Blood Services bloodmobile sits in the shade in the background.

