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GEEF's Tools for Schools Resource Center and Other Programs Make It a Happy Holiday for Harford County Teachers and Students

On December 29, 50 teachers from schools around the county received more than \$8,000 worth of school supplies courtesy of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation (GEEF).

Bel Air, MD [February 2, 2016]—When Debora Gavin Merlock founded GEEF in March of 2004, she knew she wanted to do something to counteract the negativity surrounding schools in the Edgewood community. Little did she know that 11 years later, the foundation she started would have expanded to serve the entire county, supporting thousands of students and giving out more than \$80,000 in school supplies, including \$8,000 in one day alone, this past December 29.

As part of GEEF's Tools for Schools program, teachers can come shop for free, or even have supplies delivered to them. (Merlock says GEEF has found it more effective to get supplies into the hands of teachers who can ensure materials make it to school, although homework tool kits are also provided for at-home use). GEEF also packages and delivers supplies to every Title I school in the county before school opens each year so teachers can shop at their own schools. Supplies donated for back to school 2015 alone totaled \$18,000.

But GEEF does far more than provide school and classroom supplies. It offers a variety of programs and services designed to ensure that every child has the same equipment and resources as the child next to them. Originally called the Greater Edgewood Education Foundation, in 2009 the nonprofit formally changed its name to the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation to reflect the vastly-increased scope of service to the county's 37,000 students.

"In the very beginning, we were a coalition of Edgewood area school communities focused on providing support to level the playing field for students," says Merlock. "However, we quickly realized this population has a high mobility and many students were moving out of the Edgewood area. We didn't want to turn children away, so we worked with the superintendent at the time to expand the program countywide." And Merlock says there are kids in need in all four corners of the county, from the Route 40 corridor to North Harford, Jarrettsville and even areas like Fallston that are typically considered among the more affluent.

While the scope of GEEF's support has changed, several core programs remain the same. GEEF is committed to helping students find ways to pay for college, and has awarded more than \$100,000 in college scholarships to low income students since its inception. SMILE and LEAD for Tomorrow are two

innovative multi-day leadership programs that empower Harford County Public Schools middle and high school students to learn skills critical to lifelong development. GEEF also recognizes and awards outstanding county educators through its annual EVERYDAY HEROES Gala.

Looking ahead to the future, Merlock says the GEEF board wants to continue to grow the foundation and align it with school system priorities, while always funding the needs of students rather than the school system itself. For instance, a current school system priority is getting technology in the hands of all students, but rather than fund technology for the schools, GEEF is exploring a pilot program where laptops would be allocated to a specific school's library and could be checked out for the semester.

“Ultimately, we are trying to close inequity gaps in resources and access by providing needed tools,” says Merlock. And GEEF has the success stories to show it is doing just that. From the middle school student who got to sleep in a bed for the first time at the SMILE leadership conference to the elementary school student who went on to open the first student-run credit union branch in Harford County, there are hundreds of stories of children and families positively impacted by GEEF.

Perhaps more importantly, Merlock says GEEF's programs and services create a long-lasting legacy not just for one kid or family, but for future generations.

To find out more, request services, donate or volunteer, visit GEEF's website at www.geefinc.com.

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About GEEF

Greater Excellence in Education Foundation (GEEF) invests in the education of 37,000 youth in Harford County Public Schools by providing programs and resources to compliment the learning and growth of each student regardless of their economic circumstances. GEEF works in partnership with the community to bring critical resources to help students succeed in their academic and personal goals through middle and high school leadership programs, college and career mentoring, scholarships, free school supplies for low income students, grants to support innovative classroom instruction and celebrating the education profession with the community.

Photo Caption: A teacher “shops” for supplies at GEEF's Tools for Schools Resource Center.