

We want Donald

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 01 May 2013 18:43

With 50,000 items collected in Goodwill contest, students at John Long School are banking on a visit from popular Packer

Students and staff members at John Long Middle School in Grafton have at least 50,000 reasons for Donald Driver to pay them a visit.

That's the number of items the school has collected for Pack'er Up, a collection-drive contest between elementary and middle schools throughout southeastern Wisconsin that benefits Goodwill Industries.



During the competition, which ran through April 30, more than 720 schools vied for awards, including the top prize of a May visit from Driver, the former Green Bay Packers receiver who serves as a Goodwill spokesperson.

In joining the contest for the first time, John Long students and staff enthusiastically embraced the challenge of soliciting donations of gently used clothes, toys, games, housewares and other items for needy families throughout April.

In addition to receiving more than 14,000 items through April 16, the school held "Driver On Over" Community Drop Off Days on two Saturdays. An April 20 event brought in another 14,000 items and an April 27 follow-up added 12,000.

Tack on several thousand more donations since last Saturday, and the total is believed to top 50,000, said Beth Anzia, a sixth-grade teacher and Student Council adviser who helped organize the John Long campaign.

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“It’s been crazy. It’s been beautiful,” Anzia said. “We can’t believe the amount of donations we’ve been receiving. It’s wonderful.”

Joining Anzia in organizing the collection campaign were fellow teachers Elizabeth Schalk, Barb Grossman and Nichole Pabst.

Although final results will not be announced by Goodwill until May 10, Anzia and the other organizers believe their school has an excellent shot at winning. Through the third week of the contest, no other school had a collection total close to John Long, she said.

Besides word of mouth, students and staff used a variety of media to spark their campaign, including Facebook, Twitter and newspaper advertising. Students even posted a “Goodwill Shake” dance routine on Facebook to drum up interest.

The John Long effort hasn’t gone unnoticed by the celebrity himself. After seeing an online photo of school’s success, Driver acknowledged the work with a simple Tweet: “Keep it up!!”

In addition to Driver’s visit, the grand prize includes 12 autographed copies of his popular children’s book and a Packers helmet signed by him. Second and third prizes are 12 autographed copies of the book.

After the overwhelming response, John Long contestants would be disappointed not to see Wisconsin’s favorite Donald arrive as the guest of honor at an all-school assembly, Anzia admitted.

But all will not be lost if another school pulls out a surprise victory.

“This has been a great thing for our school and community to get behind,” Anzia said.

“It’s for a such a good cause, and that’s the main reason we’re doing it.”

Goodwill Industries provides training, employment and supportive services for people with disabilities or disadvantages. The agency has more than 40 stores in southeastern Wisconsin, including a Grafton outlet that opened last year.

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Image Information: STUDENTS AND STAFF MEMBERS at John Long Middle School in Grafton found themselves surrounded by hundreds of items that were dropped off last Saturday during a collection day for the Pack'er Up contest to benefit Goodwill Industries. Photo by Sam Arendt