

# 'Be an Angel' Helps Children with Disabilities

Winter comes to one local school Dec. 17 when 32 tons of real snow are deposited on the courtyard at T.H. Rogers School, a Vanguard campus in the Houston Independent School District whose student population is one-third gifted and talented, one-third deaf and one-third multiply impaired.

Each year, volunteers from *Be an Angel*, an organization that helps children who are disabled or profoundly deaf, host Snow Day at T.H. Rogers.

"The kids look forward to this all year," said principal Dave Muzyka. "It's a treasured tradition."

Children ride the *Be an Angel* Holiday Express train, play in a petting zoo, and tell their Christmas wishes to a signing Santa who is proficient in American Sign Language.

This is but one of many initiatives *Be an Angel* undertakes to enhance the lives of children with disabilities.

Others include:

- **Purchasing, wrapping and delivering holiday gifts** for, which for many children will be the only gifts they'll receive. Last year the group bought 17,000 presents.
- **Purchasing wheelchairs, hearing aids, and other specialized adaptive equipment** for children and for the institutions that serve those children.

- **Hosting Camp Be an Angel** in summer for multiply impaired children and underwriting Camp Sign, a special camp for hearing-impaired children.

- **Constructing barrier-free playgrounds** for children. To date the group has built 26 barrier-free playgrounds in public parks in Humble, Katy and The Woodlands and on several HISD campuses.

- **Hosting a golf program** designed to enhance children's cognitive and fine-motor skills. SUCCESS (Students Undertaking Challenging Courses Ensuring development of Sportsmanship and Skill) Golf

## BE AN ANGEL HELP A CHILD

Tournament, features a nine-hole traveling mini-golf course designed specifically for special-needs children. A PGA professional visits schools and helps the children "take their best shot," an exercise that builds self-esteem while introducing kids to the game of golf.

- **Installing special sensory equipment rooms** for multiply impaired children at a number of local schools, as well as a \$1.2 million hydrotherapy complex and pool which provides physical therapy to medically fragile children at T.H. Rogers.

- **Building a state-of-the-art**

**media literacy lab** and center at T.H. Rogers, which allows disabled and hearing-impaired children to collaborate with their able-bodied peers as they write, produce and add closed-captioning to film documents.

*Be an Angel* was founded 25 years ago to help children and young adults ages birth to 22 who have multiple disabilities or profound deafness. To date, the organization has served more than 100,000 special-needs youth across Texas. Many are patients at Texas Medical Center hospitals including Shriners Hospital for Children, Texas Children's Hospital and Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital.

The organization has only three paid staff members and relies on grassroots support, said executive director Marty Boone.

"In the last 25 years, we've raised more than \$16 million for the children we serve, and 70 percent of that funding is the result of community donations in the \$25 to \$75 range," Boone said.

The remaining funding has come from grants, corporate donations and two annual fundraisers – a fall golf tournament and a spring gala.

*Be An Angel* accepts no federal, state or local government funding and is not United Way funded.

For more information visit [www.BeAnAngel.org](http://www.BeAnAngel.org) or call (281) 219-3313. ■

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