

Birthday Blessings evolved

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Name change, move to Matthews comes to nonprofit

by Erica Oglesby

Photo Right: Ryan Behrmann, 5, Alex Cervantes, 8, and Noah Behrmann, 7, help sort and label books in preparation for the move of the Bright Blessings Gift of Literacy library. It's now "The Book Nook" at The Giving Village.



Birthday Blessings began in 2005 as a humble service project for the Cervantes family of Mint Hill.

Now, with a name change and an upcoming move, the nonprofit has evolved into a successful organization that will continue to be a lifesaver thousands of homeless children in Mecklenburg County.

The organization is now called Bright Blessings and is moving to Matthews. A ribbon-cutting celebration and open house will be held Jan. 17 from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at its new locations, 608-A Matthews-Mint Hill Road. Volunteers are needed to help get the facility, which will be called The Giving Village, ready for its grand opening April 2.

“One of (Bright Blessings) founding goals was to provide relevant, hands-on volunteer opportunities for children and youth,” Amy Cervantes said. “This new location, The Giving Village, embodies that goal by creating a comfortable, safe and uplifting environment for families, youth groups and adult groups of all ages to participate in supporting homeless children across our community.”

Previously operating out of a 1,000-square-foot office off Clanton Road in Charlotte, Bright Blessings’ new Matthews home boasts 4,000 square feet and will feature a layout that will meet many of its growing needs. With more space, the organization can now offer a functional area where supplies and products used for parties can be easily accessed by volunteers, and even stay-at-home parents can join the volunteer efforts thanks to a safe and visible play room designated for young children to play while moms and dads lend a hand.

A name change was necessary, Amy says, because Birthday Blessings has expanded its mission to make a difference throughout the year. The organization now offers a Bless-A-Baby program which assists newborn babies and their parents who go from the hospital to homelessness. The group also has launched a literacy program for the many other children it serves.

Still growing, Bright Blessings is excited to call Matthews home, Amy Cervantes said.

“As Mint Hill residents, and founders of this organization, John and I had always hoped to establish the nonprofit’s physical, long-term presence within the community that first supported it,” she said.

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A bright beginning

The organization came about when John and Amy Cervantes wanted to do something to help the community that their then 3-year-old and 5-month-old sons could participate in. After celebrating their oldest son, Alex's, third birthday, the Cervantes' began wondering how homeless children were celebrated on their birthdays. Concerned that these children may not be as celebrated as their sons were, Amy did some research and was disappointed to learn that there was no organization in place to make birthdays special for children without a home.

“We knew right away that maybe (helping celebrate homeless children's birthdays) was a small, but hopefully impactful, way that our family could help kids less fortunate, and a project that would be relevant and meaningful to our own children,” Amy said.

The Cervantes family soon began planning a giant birthday party for about 40 children living at the Salvation Army Center of Hope in Charlotte. Making the party a family effort, John, Amy and Alex shopped for birthday presents, crafts and supplies. The Cervantes family hosted their first party in August 2005, and were blown away by the positive impact their deed had on the children who attended.

“Most of the children had never been to a birthday party, not to mention one for themselves,” Amy said. “One of the birthday girls actually asked me, with shy and hopeful optimism, if the presents were hers to keep.”

Want to help?

Volunteers are needed to help Bright Blessings, formerly known as Birthday Blessings, move into their new Matthews home Jan. 17. The day-long event will begin with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10:30 a.m. at 608-A Matthews-Mint Hill Road. Volunteer activities, from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m., will include projects for adults and youth such as painting, shelving, organizing supplies, labeling books, creating care kits and more.

To volunteer, e-mail contact@brightblessingsusa.org.