

Tough as rocks

Cheerful deliveries meant to show 'JC Strong' on Jackson Street

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Rumbling and clanging moved up Jackson Street on Wednesday morning, following part of the path of the May 22 tornado that devastated many homes along the street. But these sounds were of children delivering joy and symbols of hope in the battered neighborhood.

Cymbals and drums of the Boys & Girls Club of Jefferson City Drumline led the way up Jackson as other children of the club placed painted rocks and flower pots — petunias and zinnias included — in front of homes and along sidewalks.

Resident Quincie Hickmon, at 909 Jackson St., said “it gave me hope and faith” to see the gestures.

Fifth-grader Madison Phillips later said, “With the flowers, I really hope that they take them, and if they see a house and it’s getting torn down and won’t be rebuilt, they’ll take the flower out of the pot and plant the flower into where that house was taken down, so they can remember which house it was.”

Phillips added, “With the rocks, they should keep spreading them everywhere, so that the people all around Jefferson City, even the ones who didn’t get hit should feel that they are safe and nothing bad will happen to them, because they have these rocks to remind them that they’re safe.”

“Spread the joy and love,” fellow Boys & Girls Club member and fifth-grader Abraham “Abe” Franken added of his hopes for the activity.

The painted flower pots and rocks that Franken, Phillips and other Boys & Girls Club members placed on Jackson Street on Wednesday came out of a collaboration between the club, Capital Arts and the Jefferson City Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department.

Leann Porrello, who is executive director of Capital Arts and cultural arts specialist with Jefferson City’s Parks Department, said, “When the tornado hit, as an art gallery, we said, ‘Well, what can we do, not only on a helping level, but just as an art level?’ So, the board got together and decided that ‘JC Rocks’ was already really established in this town and a great way to send a message. We decided to do JC Rocks for ‘JC Strong.’ We came over to the Boys & Girls Club and painted about 200 rocks with all the kids.”

Capital Arts' gallery was also opened to let community members paint another 100 rocks as well as flower pots.

Stephanie Johnson, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of Jefferson City, and Porrello said it's the first time the club and Capital Arts have collaborated to this level.

"We were so excited to get a call from Leann and her board members with this idea, that they wanted to paint rocks and put them along Jackson Street. That's very much the neighborhood of the Boys & Girls Club," Johnson said.

"We have lots of kids that are here this summer that lost their home in the tornado. Some of them are in your Purple Group — actually we have some in all of our color groups," Johnson said to Franken and Phillips. The Purple Group of Club members were the children who got to place the rocks and flower pots Wednesday.

"We really wanted the flowers to symbolize regrowth and just coming together with the city — as well as the rocks — just symbolizing bringing cheer and joy to the town, but also just to remind people that we're here for you," Porrello said.

"We put 300 (rocks) out on Jackson Street today, and slowly over the next couple weeks, that 300 will reach so many lives, so many other neighborhoods in the city, and so I'm really excited just to see how many lives will be touched just by one street and one rock," Porrello said.

"And we hope other people in the community join us," Johnson said. "Go over, see the rocks we put on Jackson Street and put your own out there, as well."

On Jackson Street, Hickmon said her home had sustained about \$75,000 in damage in the EF-3 tornado, and she still had interior repairs to do.

"It could have been worse," compared to her neighbors' homes, though, she said.

"I'm not packing up and running away," Hickmon said, and it's important to know "people do still care" — something the flowers and rocks showed.

Hickmon said she may make a rock garden with the gifts.