



## Hickory Tavern students receive inspiration and new shoes with Samaritan's Feet visit

By Judith Brown  
Staff Writer

Nearly 700 Laurens County children went home with brand new shoes Wednesday after Hickory Tavern School hosted Samaritan's Feet, a non-profit based in Charlotte that provides new shoes to children around the world. The Hickory Tavern gym was filled with dozens of volunteers, including more than 70 from area Walmart stores or Walmart Distribution Center in Laurens in addition to members of the Hickory Tavern Volunteer Fire Department and community residents.

The Walmart volunteers actually help fund the program because their hours are counted toward Samaritan's Feet through the company's Volunteerism Always Pays program, said Sheila Dotson of the Walmart Distribution Center. Dotson has coordinated the last few Samaritan's Feet visits in Laurens County.

"The first time I volunteered with Samaritan's Feet it was shocking to me that our kids are going to school with holes in their shoes," Dotson said, adding that often they also discover that the children's feet have grown and may be as much as two sizes too small.

Samaritan's Feet, which is unrelated to another organization called Samaritan's Purse, was launched by Manny Ohonme, a Nigerian who received his first pair of shoes at the age of nine from a missionary to his country. As an adult he knew that people without shoes run a much greater risk of injuries and disease. He began the program 15



Photo by Judith Brown

**NEW SHOES!** — Hickory Tavern kindergartener Mariah Cook gives a thumbs up moments after she and her classmates receives brand new shoes Wednesday morning. A partnership between Samaritan's Feet and Walmart's Volunteerism Always Pays program provided shoes to about 680 children on Wednesday.

years ago, said Phil Campbell, one of five regional directors who take the program to schools nationwide.

"By June when school is out we will have done 200 of these across the nation," Campbell said.

In addition to those events, teams of volunteers disperse shoes to numerous countries every year, and many people use the trips as meaningful vacations.

Every place the volunteers are invited, the shoes are important but so is the encouragement to children.

"Our volunteers are trained to encourage the children to

dream big," Dotson said. "So I'll ask what they want to do when they grow up or what their dreams are and tell them if they stay in school, that will help them achieve (their dreams)."

She referred to a story Campbell told the volunteers about a young nurse currently working in a large city hospital who recently went back to encourage children in her home church in an impoverished area of Kentucky.

It was during the very first year of Samaritan's Feet 15 years ago, and the volunteer asked what the future nurse wanted to do. The volunteer

encouraged the child to stay in school and work hard.

"We didn't know anything about it at the time but her pastor let us know that when she talked to the children in her home church she said it was the day she got her new shoes. No one had ever told her she could achieve her dreams, and she never forgot it," Campbell said. "We hear about a few stories like that, but we know we are impacting many more that we will never hear about."

Anyone who would like more information can go to the website, [www.samaritan-feet.org](http://www.samaritan-feet.org).

## County council presented dire roads assessment

By John Clayton  
Editor

A recently completed assessment of the condition of county roads revealed a worsening problem that will cost Laurens County millions of dollars to fix.

Council members learned at their regular meeting Tuesday that the assessment identified 221.2 miles of county roads that have reached a stage of degradation termed "Class 3," meaning the roads have severe cracking and damage. Another 56.9 miles were designated as "Class 4," which is the worst condition, requiring at least some reconstruction in addition to paving and sealing.

As part of the proposal, administrators are seeking a \$7 hike to the county's road fees.

The county is responsible for 401 miles of roads in total with an average length of about a half-mile.

"Right now, we're asking our roads to last 50 years. They're not," said Laurens County Purchasing Director Billy Wilson, who presented the report along with Roads and Bridges Supervisor Tim Stoddard.

Wilson also presented a plan for the county to get ahead of the road degradation, asking council members to consider the purchase of paving equipment and additional staff to operate it.

Doing the work in-house would save the county an estimated \$23 million compared to the bids received from private firms, Wilson said. Bids for the overall project to repave and repair Class 3 roads in the county came in at more than \$38.4 million, compared to the \$15.38 million estimate to do the work in-house.

Wilson and the Roads & Bridges Department are requesting \$665,643 annually from council, including \$562,000 for 10 pieces of equipment and \$665,643 for three new Roads & Bridges workers.

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