



AJC HELPING HANDS

Pebble Tossers creates volunteer opportunities for Atlanta's youth

By Shannon Dominy
For the AJC

WHO'S HELPING

Pebble Tossers

Services: By partnering with 70-plus vetted nonprofit partners, Pebble Tossers creates opportunities for Atlanta's youth to volunteer in order to create real change in their communities and to develop leadership skills.

Where supplies have gone: Pebble Tossers serves youth and families in all communities throughout greater Atlanta.

How to help: Donate at the link below or attend the Pebble Tossers drive-in movie summer celebration today. Details at pebbletossers.org/drive-in

Where to donate: Visit pebbletossers.org/donate-now or donate via Venmo (@pebbletossers) or PayPal (paypal.me/pebbletossers).

How to get involved: Become a member of Pebble Tossers and participate in any service project that works for your schedule.

If you are involved in or know of an organization working to bring relief to the Atlanta community during the coronavirus pandemic OR you are with an organization with supplies that you don't know where to donate, please email us at Shannon.Dominy@gmail.com.

Pebble Tossers is a nonprofit founded by two mothers in 2008 with a mission to empower and equip youth to lead through service. To do this Pebble Tossers matches volunteers with causes and projects that match their interests and passions. "Research across disciplines demonstrates that youth today feel more disconnected, anxious, and depressed than previous generations," said Jennifer Gynn, founder and executive director of Pebble Tossers. "In contrast, research has shown that youth who volunteer are more likely to feel connected to their communities, do better in school and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Volunteering has also shown benefits in raising self-esteem and influencing happiness."

By partnering with more than 70 vetted nonprofit partners, Pebble Tossers makes it possible for Atlanta's youth to engage in volunteerism to create real change in their communities and develop their own leadership skills.

Pebble Tossers has 19,800 volunteers that engage in over 49,700 volunteer service hours annually.

When the coronavirus pandemic made volunteering in person more dangerous, Pebble Tossers pivoted to make

153 of their projects virtual in order to continue to work to meet the dire needs of the community.

"Pebble Tossers hosted these projects via social media, Zoom, parking lots, driveways and office building courtyards," said Gynn. Right now Pebble Tossers

is spreading the word about its drive-in movie summer celebration today at 7 p.m. at The Springs Cinema + Taphouse. Attendees are encouraged to wear their pajamas and bring a set of new children's pajamas for a pajama drive for Foster Care Support Foundation.



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Atlanta

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GRANT PARK



Mackenzie Smith of Wesley International Academy pulls up her copy of "Stamped," a book about racial issues she read with her eighth grade classmates. COURTESY

Wesley Academy tackles tough issues with shared reading

By H.M. Cauley
For the AJC

Wesley International Academy's Melanie Dillett-Dukes was looking for a way to start a meaningful conversation about events in the news. And she wanted to have that discussion with her colleagues first.

"After the trauma of black and brown people was broadcast to the world, I proposed to my executive director that we have a serious conversation," she said. "We have a mixed staff, and we're a predominantly black school with about 750 students in kindergarten through eighth, but we didn't have strong, meaningful conversations on racism, inequities and oppression. We needed to start talking about racism and how it impacts students, teachers and parents."

Dillett-Dukes suggested the staff read "Stamped," a book by Jason Reynolds that was published last summer to tackle just such complex topics.

"We started off as a staff book club," she said. "But we also saw how the next generation was ready for change. This was a book that both staff and middle schoolers could dive into."

Last fall, the academy began hosting "equity journey gatherings" for the 80-plus teachers, staff and administrators.

MAKING THE GRADE

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to see how my classmates felt about it," she said. "I didn't know exactly how the book was going to talk about things, but I was excited to learn more."

Jones said she learned a good bit about how history and leaders relate to race issues. "It talked about things that aren't often taught, but it's important for my generation to be aware of these issues to hopefully change the future for the better."

Ainsley Odle, 13, had read "Stamped" before it was introduced in class. "But this time it gave me a different take, and I was able to go more in depth about the topics with my friends," she said. "We even talked about it outside of school. It really forced me to look at myself and my views."

The students' connections surprised even the teachers. A survey of the young readers revealed they had stronger feelings about treating others better and understanding where people come from. They also were keen on sharing the book with their parents who then engaged faculty and staff in conversations, too.

Chloe Jones, 14, was an eighth grader when the book was introduced and was happy to read it.

"In light of all the protests that happened prior to the school year, I felt it needed to be discussed in our classroom, and I really wanted

TOP STORY

Gwinnett

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LAWRENCEVILLE

Council member Keith Roche will not seek a third term in November

By Tyler Wilkins
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Lawrenceville officials held back tears Monday evening after a two-term council member announced his name will not be on the ballot in November.

Council member Keith Roche, who took office in 2014, will not seek a third term on City Council. He said he made the difficult decision so he could spend more time with family.

"I've had the privilege of working side-by-side with some of the greatest public servants that you're ever going to find," Roche said before the council's Monday meeting. "I am,



Keith Roche

however, a little tired. I look forward to not living by a calendar and occasionally being bored."

Roche said he's proud to have carried forward the vision for Lawrenceville created by his predecessors. He noted major projects in which he played a role, including the SouthLawn residential development, Lawrenceville Performing Arts Center and College Corridor.

He also praised the Gwinnett city's work on the remodel of the Hooper-Renwick School into a library and museum, new businesses in Lawrenceville's entertainment district and various infrastructure improvements done over the past eight years.

"We have hopefully changed the whole complexion of Lawrenceville as a destination, a place to come live, work and play," Roche said. Roche previously served on the city's Planning Commission until pushed to run for City Council. He said he was "hoping I would win and praying I wouldn't" while campaigning, but it turned out "to be one of the most incredibly rewarding experiences of my life."