

Coats for Kids drive kicks off

Effort collected 30,000 coats last year.

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For the Goulding family, the annual Coats for Kids drive is not just about community service; it's a competitive tradition.

For the past two years, Canyon Vista Middle School in the Round Rock district has collected more coats for the charity event than any other middle school in the Austin area. The coat collection drive kicked off Monday, and for eighth-grader Nick Goulding, 14, another win for his school would match the three-year streak set when his older sister attended the school.

Tarah Goulding, 20, came by Monday morning to support her brother and said she has volunteered with the charity since middle school. She encouraged fellow members of the University of Texas' Liberal Arts Council to volunteer for distribution day, Dec. 8, when thousands of Central Texas children will enter the Palmer Events Center to pick out their new winter coats.

"It's teaching them service and the value of giving," said their mother, Kelly Goulding. "I've done this with both of my kids for years, and they just love it."

The Junior League of Austin organizes and oversees Coats for Kids, which distributed more than 30,000 coats last year. Now in its 21st year, the charity event began when Paul Brown of Jack Brown Cleaners got the idea from friends at a dry-cleaning convention.

"We've been doing it so many years now, a lot of kids are giving back coats that they've outgrown," Brown said.

The Junior League's Coats for Kids spokeswoman, Julie Ballard, said local businesses are pitching in.

This year, the charity challenged children's clothing stores to collect or donate the most coats. Other corporate sponsors have donated money to the league to buy new coats, which get mixed in with the collected coats.

Schools have until Nov. 30 to collect as many coats as possible, but donations will be accepted at any Jack Brown Cleaners location until Dec. 5.

Nick Goulding said his school's goal is to collect 600 coats this year, about 100 more than students

collected last year.

After the day's last class, Nick and a couple of his classmates beat the rush of students outside. The kids dropped their backpacks and picked up hand-painted signs with phrases such as "Keep Austin Warm" to draw attention to the collection bins made from three cardboard moving boxes — one for each grade.

All three were starting to fill up, a better start than they've ever had, Kelly Goulding said.

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