



Group raises \$160,000 for school after April tornado

Hackleburg schools destroyed

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A religious organization in the Black Belt raised more than \$160,000 for schools to help neighbors from the north recover from the April tornadoes.

Friends of Hale County Foundation, a Christian organization that focuses aid for the Black Belt and surrounding areas, donated \$101,000 to Hackleburg schools, said Law Lamar, the organization's founder. The small Marion County town was virtually wiped off the map in the April 27 tornado, and its schools were among the buildings destroyed.

"I can't put it into words how grateful we are to everyone who helped," said Marion County Superintendent of Education Ryan Hollingsworth. "We've had so many donations from local and state and across the country."

Lamar said his organization's donation was one effort among many to get the Hackleburg schools back on their feet.

"There's a school there that's open on the first day because the people of Alabama made it happen," Lamar said.

The organization obtained contributions from Books-A-Million, American Osment, Alabama Power, Summer Classics, the Hoover School System and individuals around the state, Lamar said. Friends of Hale County used the contributions and monetary donations to aid eight schools and two school systems.

"We would not be having school starting Monday the 15th without all of those donations, not just materials but labor," Hollingsworth said. "We didn't get the go-ahead until Aug. 2 to put things in the rooms. We couldn't do that on our own."

In Hackleburg, the money from Friends of Hale County went to purchase 100 open-front desks with adjustable legs, 61 chairs, 444 large desks, one table, 36 teachers desks, 35 teachers chairs, 24 filing cabinets, one cooler unit, eight library tables and 64 chairs for the library and computer lab.

"They had massive amounts of crayons and clothes and stuff, but they didn't have any furniture," Lamar said. "The people from Alabama just popped up from everywhere and helped that school."

Books-A-Million gave 3,000 books to Hackleburg's high school library, he said. An additional 3,000 were purchased from a school surplus warehouse in Atlanta.

The organization also made several sizable donations to other schools in West Alabama, including 240 desks for Gordo Elementary and 250 desks for the Fayette County school system. The total value of the donations came to more than \$163,000.

Lamar originally formed the nonprofit organization to help needy people and communities in Hale County. Since then, its work has spread to nine counties.

"I think it should be friends of West Alabama," Lamar said with a chuckle.

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