‘Share the Spirit’ gives shoes to Beardstown students (originally published 4-12-2012)

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On Wednesday, April 4 Share the Spirit Foundation held a shoe drive for 62 needy children that attend Gard Elementary School from Kindergarten to 6th grade. Each student picked out a pair of brand new shoes off the shelves at Walmart with the assistance of a volunteer. Principal Cheryl Summers of Gard Elementary picked around ten deserving students from each grade that would benefit the most from the charity. “It is awesome what they (Share the Spirit Foundation) are doing,” Summers said, “seeing the faces of the 1st graders with their new shoes was wonderful.”

Share the Spirit is based out of Sherman, IL. The President of the foundation, Tonya Vopel, explained how they decided to come to Beardstown: “Last fall I met Lance Giesler, one of the teachers at Gard Elementary, and when I found out he was a teacher at Beardstown I immediately told him about Share the Spirit and how we wanted to help in that area. Lance put me in touch with Principal Cheryl Summers, and with his assistance, the event was organized.” Vopel went on to say, “Share the Spirit always invites our donors to attend a shoe drive to see how their money helps… we take nothing for administrative costs or travel. It all goes to the kids!”

With the help of an outreach coordinator Vopel and co-founder of Share the Spirit, Karen Voepel, look to schools near their locality and teachers as resources to reach those students in need of shoes. Their motto is: “Helping to share the burden of providing for those in need.”

The foundation helps communities around the nation with projects that include shoe drives, weatherization of homes and even rebuilding homes in New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina. This summer the foundation is going to Eloy, Arizona where some of the kids in that area use pieces of cardboard for the soles of their shoes. The foundation is proud that the summer projects enable the group to incorporate teenagers to assist at the shoe drives. The group appeals to the upcoming generation of young volunteers that want to experience the feeling of giving back to the community.