



A firefighter takes part in last year's effort.

Firefighters to kick off boots

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

More wheelchairs. More therapy. More campers.

That's what the Muscular Dystrophy Association is looking to fund with the proceeds from its popular fundraiser, dubbed "Fill-the-Boot," which will literally hit the streets this Friday.

The national nonprofit provides assistance to people suffering from more than 40 different kinds of neuromuscular diseases, including ALS, more commonly known as Lou Gherig's Disease. National Chairman Jerry Lewis is credited with heightening awareness about the organization, through his famous 21.5-hour telethon that dates back to 1966.

"Firefighters and the MDA have been partnered since the 1950s; we have a very special relationship," said the MDAs Jennifer Taylor, director of the 17-county district that encompasses Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. "Filling the boot has become a large tradition for a lot of fire departments (nationwide)... they have raised millions of dollars."

The MDA helps patients offset the cost of equipment, such as wheelchairs, leg braces and communication devices; and provides supplemental funding for patients to attend support groups and summer camps designed for children with neuromuscular problems. It also lends monetary support to designated facilities to further research efforts in the field.

More than 30 members of the Winston-Salem Fire Department have agreed to donate their time to the local effort this year.

"We do this because we enjoy it; we enjoy helping people," said Fireman Scott Gauldin, who has volunteered with Fill the Boot for more than 13 years.

Despite his longtime connection to the MDA, Gauldin only recently began visiting the summer camp the fundraiser helps support. Getting to know the children there has been a life changing experience for him, he says.

"I was hesitant at first, not knowing how to handle being around a handicapped kid," he confessed. "But (I learned) they don't want you to treat them any different than any other kid."

The Fill the Boot effort is traditionally led by the Winston-Salem Professional Firefighters' Association, but was opened to the entire department this year.

"We're very proud to be partnered with the Winston-Salem Fire Department," remarked Taylor. "It gives us the opportunity to have more manpower ... and to raise more money."

Members of the WSFD have renamed their fundraising effort

Festival

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said. "It makes reading them more interesting."

More than 8,000 book lovers showed up for Saturday's festival at Bethabara Park on Saturday. Attendees were able



Harlee

to meet more than 45 authors and illustrators, watch popular chefs at work and sample their recipes, and kids had activities and an area all to themselves.

Debbie Harlee, president of the BookMarks Festival, was pleased with the outcome of this year's festival.

"Our mission is to bring readers and writers together to enjoy literary experiences. Authors get encouraged by readers. Fans find new favorites, meet authors, ask questions and gain insights," said Harlee. "Readers find fun ways to immerse themselves in reading. They are not confined to a lecture hall. They are seated in an outdoor tent. They are free to enjoy the activities."

The authors ranged from the



Photos by Felicia Long

Olena Crawford with her daughter and two other youngsters.

well known to the up and coming. Famed poet Nikki Giovanni, a professor at Virginia Tech, was there reading, "The Grasshopper's Song: An Aesop's Fable Revisited," so was Charlotte's Omar Tyree, whose latest is "Pecking Order."

Even Mayor Allen Joines got in on the action, taking time to stop by the event to read "Thump, Quack, Moo" to youngsters.

Olena Crawford came out to

the Festival with her daughter, Katya, and two of Katya's friends. The girls were in heaven among the sea of books and writers, Crawford said.

"They are old friends who love to read. They also love to write," said Crawford. "I knew the BookMarks Festival would give them the opportunity to see lots of books and experience them first-hand."

Velma Fields, a registered nurse, came out to the festival



Author Marlena Jareaux with some of her children's books.

with her sister Carolyn Archie. Although Archie had been ill, attending the book festival was uplifting for her.

"I am really glad we came. You would have thought that we were kids. We (went) into the children's storytelling tents," said Fields.

We enjoyed the storyteller Orville Hicks and the author Julia T. Ebel. His mountain stories and mountain roots were hilarious. This was my first time coming, but I'll be back next year for sure."

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