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Local students to receive free shoes

Program arose from concern over students' needs

Piedmont Health, in collaboration with the **Alamance-Burlington School System** and **FootCentric**, will provide free athletic shoes and shoe fittings by local physical therapists and pedorthists' shoes to students at **Sylvan Elementary School** on **Thursday, Feb. 21**.

Sylvan is located at 7718 Sylvan Road, in Snow Camp, N.C. The program will start at 8 a.m. and will last until 2 p.m.

Throughout the school day, approximately 170 Sylvan Elementary students will have their feet measured and will be fitted with a free pair of athletic shoes, donated by various sponsors.

The program was spearheaded by Brittany Mann, a Medical Administrative Assistant at Piedmont Health.

"Sylvan and Snow Camp remind me of the school and community that I grew up in and I saw it as a great opportunity to give back," Mann said. "I love working with the schools and providing services for the children who are in need."

Mann noticed a need for better footwear among the students at Sylvan, a school where 60 percent of its 300 students are eligible for free or reduced meals through the National School Lunch Program. Through observation and talking with school staff, Mann realized that many students were arriving at school with shoes that were broken, too big, too small or otherwise uncomfortable. She invited FootCentric, a continuing education company established by Patricia Pande, a physical therapist who has provided therapeutic services for patients with foot pain for over 35 years, to provide services at the school. FootCentric offers Free Your Feet events, in which they partner with the University of North Carolina Physical Therapy Faculty Clinic and the North Carolina Physical Therapy Association to bring medical assessment and therapeutic footwear to North Carolina residents in need.

Last month, school employees and community volunteers prescreened students for shoe donations. During the prescreening, students' feet were traced to help FootCentric get an idea of shoe sizes they will need for the event. Pat Pande and

her volunteers then worked to get donated pairs of athletic shoes for the students. About 400 pairs had been received as of last week.

On Wednesday, Feb. 20, about 10 to 20 volunteers will deliver and unload the donated shoes to the school. The prescreened Sylvan students will then go to the school gallery Thursday, with one classroom of students visiting the school's gallery at a time.

Brian Toomey, CEO of Piedmont Health, praised Brittany Mann for getting the initiative going. "While providing shoes is, of course, not part of Piedmont Health's typical services, it does fit in with our mission of making sure that all of North Carolina's residents have access to high-quality health care and to preventive care," Toomey said. "Inadequate footwear can lead to unhealthy feet and other health problems, so we are glad to be a part of this worthy effort."

For more information about Piedmont Health, call 919-933-8494 or visit www.piedmonthhealth.org.