

# The News-Gazette.com

## Homeless children will be treated like stars

By Julie Wurth

Saturday December 12, 2009

CHAMPAIGN – A group of homeless children will be treated to a "premiere" of Disney's new "Princess and the Frog" movie in high style, thanks to students at Champaign Central High School.

About 20 children, ages 4 to 12, from Restoration Urban Ministries will ride by limousine to the Beverly Cinema on Saturday afternoon to see the new animated feature, the first with an African-American heroine.

The "Red Carpet Affair" is a service project by the Friends of Rachel program at Central High School, which finds ways for students to work together to change the culture of their school and community by performing acts of kindness for the less fortunate. It's named for Rachel Scott, the first person killed in the Columbine High School shootings in 1999.

The Friends of Rachel Club wanted to do something related to homelessness, and rather than give out coats and hats they decided to "create a memory" – take the children "somewhere special, somewhere we make them feel important," said adviser Vernessa Gipson, director of family, school and community partnership for the Regional Office of Education.

The group was arranging a limousine to take the children from the shelter to the theater and give them the red carpet treatment, Gipson said.

Two students from the club will dress up as the Princess and the Frog (with the Frog also demanding a prince costume to greet the students after the movie). "Paparazzi" will be on hand to take photos of the kids with the stars, who will also sign autographs and greet fans. And each child will also get a huge stuffed dog or bear with a picture of the princess on it, Gipson said.

The club has received about \$140 in donations to help cover the cost.

"The kids are so excited," said Dawn Pyle, who works at Restoration. "It's going to be awesome. It's such a cool event."

Gipson said seeing such a racially and socially diverse group of high school students from all parts of the community work together on this project gives her hope. Earlier, they wrote thank-yous to the janitorial and cafeteria staff, to recognize people who are often forgotten, and starting in January they will begin a "season of service," she said.

The "Princess and the Frog" movie has special meaning for Gipson, on several fronts. Her cousin, Leah Chase, is owner of New Orleans' Dookie Chase's Restaurant, the oldest African-American restaurant in the country. Chase and the restaurant are both featured in the movie.

And Gipson is thrilled to finally see an African-American princess in one of Disney's animated features. Her three grown daughters – ages 22, 25 and 28 – all want a Tiana doll for Christmas, and Gipson bought five extras because they were on sale.

"She's so beautiful, and she has such beautiful ethnic features," Gipson said. "I wish it had been 20 years ago, when my kids were that little.

"I'm just excited. Girls like princesses, period, and finally there's a princess that looks like them."

---

Find this article at:

[http://www.news-gazette.com/news/2009/12/12/homeless\\_children\\_will\\_be\\_treated\\_like\\_stars](http://www.news-gazette.com/news/2009/12/12/homeless_children_will_be_treated_like_stars)

## Comments

---

The News-Gazette.com  
The East Central Illinois Online News and Advertising Source

---

Contents of this site are © Copyright 2009 The News-Gazette, Inc. All rights reserved.