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Program keeps lights on afterschool
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(Courtesy Photo/ABLE FAMILIES) Students of ABLE Families' Afterschool Program conduct a dulcimer performance for the crowd at Thursday night's Lights on Afterschool event, with Heidi Muller directing their performance.

KERMIT — Children, parents, and community leaders gathered at ABLE Families last Thursday night for a Lights On Afterschool rally. The gathering was one of 7,500 such events held across the nation, emphasizing the importance of keeping the lights on and the doors open for afterschool programs, which serve millions of children who are unsupervised and at risk each weekday afternoon in the United States. Speakers at the rally warned that tight budgets are endangering afterschool programs here in the Tug Valley and around the country, forcing many to cut back or even close their doors.

Kermit's Lights On Afterschool participants saw students sing, play the dulcimer, put on a puppet show, and give testimonials to the importance of ABLE Families' Afterschool Program in their lives. This year marks the 10th annual Lights On Afterschool, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance. More than 1 million Americans took part in the nationwide rally to show support for the afterschool programs that keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families.

In attendance for the event were Mayor Johnny Linville, who opened the night by reading a mayoral proclamation declaring October 22, 2009, as "Lights on Afterschool Day" in the town of Kermit, and Mingo County commissioners John Mark Hubbard and Greg "Hootie" Smith, who presented ABLE Families with a \$5,000 check towards the purchase of a new office vehicle.

Tim White, program coordinator for the “Weed and Seed Project” in Huntington, served as the event’s keynote speaker. After conducting a read aloud with the students, Mr. White addressed the parents and community members in attendance.

“You all should be extremely thankful for the work being done by the staff here at ABLE Families to provide your children with an afterschool program,” White told the crowd. “Not all communities are lucky enough to have programs such as this.”

The event also served as an occasion to honor retiring-Director Sr. Janet Peterworth, who has led ABLE Families since its founding in 1995. After students presented Peterworth with a thank you letter for her hard work over the years, event host Stefan Barber remarked, “Driven by a compassion for her fellow man and guided by the Lord’s Word, Sr. Janet has spent 15 years working so that she may one day leave this region a better place than she found it. We at ABLE Families believe she has achieved that goal.”

This year’s event comes just days after the release of compelling new data demonstrating the unmet demand for afterschool programs in West Virginia. According to the report America After 3 p.m., recently published by the Afterschool Alliance, 13 percent of school-age children are in afterschool programs, while 21 percent are unsupervised in the afternoons and another 9 percent are in the care of brothers and sisters. According to survey, the parents of 30 percent of children in the state who are not already in an afterschool program would enroll their children in one, if a program were available to them — an indication of the considerable unmet demand for afterschool programs in the state.

“We are all very proud of our afterschool students,” said Barry Hudock, who replaces Sr. Janet Peterworth as ABLE Families’ director. “There’s no reason that learning should stop at 3 p.m., particularly if the alternative is unsupervised time in front of a television set, or any of the dangerous or unhealthy behaviors that can ensnare children in the afternoons. Like so many other afterschool programs around the nation, we strive to provide local children with a safe, fun atmosphere within which their education can continue during the afternoon hours.”

ABLE Families’ After-school Program opened in 1999. It now serves between 25-35 students from Kermit K-8 daily, providing homework assistance, mentoring, tutoring, recreation, mathematics, and numerous creative activities.

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