




The Belles recently purchased school supplies to help younger Katy students get the year off to a good start



The Belles take pride in helping others in the Katy community





Every year, the Morton Ranch High School Belles organize a variety of community service projects as part of the Belles Give Back program



MORTON RANCH *Belles* GIVE BACK

Dance team members are dedicated to giving back to the Katy community

*Written by Noreen Stavinoha and Mary Hogan
Photos Courtesy of April Hunt*


When an elementary school needed supplies for some of its students, the Morton Ranch High School Belles joined forces with other dance team members from across Katy ISD and came to the rescue. Armed with a list of necessities, the Belles dug into their own pockets and bought items to help get the younger students off to a successful start in school. Their random act of kindness was just one of many they do every year as part of the Belles Give Back program. "Introducing our students to community service projects truly opens their eyes to the world around them," shares April Hunt, the team's director. She adds, "Reaching out beyond ourselves to help the community is a very rewarding experience. They always comment about how great it feels to help someone else."

Wowing Fans and the Community

Over the years, Hunt has seen the Belles transform into a multifaceted organization that focuses not only on wowing fans with high kicks and fast turns, but also on community involvement and giving back to others in Katy. The Belles Give Back program began three years ago, but Hunt says she feels like the team is just getting started making an impact in the community.

"Katy is amazing," she shares. "There are so many opportunities to serve others, and our community is very gracious and appreciative of our projects. I know Belles Give Back has made an impact when I hear the reaction of our students after the event has taken place. There have been tears, laughter, and sometimes silence after projects."

At one of the football games this year, the Belles did double duty. In addition to performing during halftime, team members stood at the gates before the game to seek support from attendees for breast cancer research. Generous fans made it a successful campaign. "When you come back to school on Monday after a Friday night performance to compliments from other students, it really feels good. All that hard work paid off," shares Taylor Hampton, senior officer.



Recently, the Maverick dance team collected donations for breast cancer research before a football game

Along with spreading school spirit, the Belles also take time to help clean up their campus, deliver holiday meals and toys to families in need, and perform for residents at the Brookwood Community



"There's a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing we made a difference in someone else's life"

- Angela Zuniga, a Maverick Belle

Reaching out to Local Families

Every year, school counselors provide the Maverick Belles with information about a family in need of a holiday meal. The Belles and their parents are allowed to use school facilities to prepare a complete Thanksgiving meal and present it to the family.

"It's wonderful to see the smiles on their faces when we bring them their Thanksgiving dinner," says Courtney Oliver, a junior Maverick Belle. "We have a lot of fun beforehand getting it ready."

As Christmas approaches, the Belles also prepare to help local families in need celebrate the season by providing gifts and toys. "There's a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing we made a difference in someone else's life," shares Angela Zuniga, a Maverick Belle.

Another occasion for giving back takes place every December when the Belles perform at the Brookwood Community, a facility providing meaningful employment for adults with disabilities.

Recently, the team reached out to Katy student Quonziah Ford, who is fighting cancer, sending him letters of hope. "Sometimes a letter of encouragement makes a difference in someone's life," explains Hunt. "We are thinking of Ziah and his family."

A Generous Spirit

The generosity of spirit shown in the Belles Give Back program isn't limited to off-campus events and activities. Within the group, there is an attitude of mutual caring. The senior members are quick to come to the aid of a newer member who is having trouble with a new routine. They will take the time to give that student tips that help her get where she needs to be.

In the halls of MRHS, the Belles strive to step up to the plate helping their fellow classmates. They regularly designate days to work with school custodians to clean the campus of debris, so their school can really sparkle and be a source of pride to everyone.

Throughout the next year, the team hopes to also be able to provide dresses for homecoming and prom to local girls, so they can enjoy attending these very important events in style.

With a caring spirit and dedication to the community, the Maverick Belles have taken a proactive role in making Katy a better place for everyone. "We are teaching one another how to give graciously and think beyond ourselves," Hunt shares. "I think we all benefit from this project." **KM**

NOREEN STAVINOHA lives in Katy with her husband and miniature schnauzer and loves to tell the stories of interesting people.