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'The Big Chick-CAN'

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MARIETTA- Sweet potatoes are stacked on top of green beans; pumpkins sit next to beets and cranberries. Red and white cans of diced tomatoes and white potatoes were the stars of the show, all coming together to form, yes that's right, a 6-foot-chicken.

Drafting students from Chattahoochee Technical College collected canned goods as part of their service-learning project to recreate a Marietta landmark, the Big Chicken on North Cobb Parkway.

Chattahoochee Tech students used more than 4,000 cans to build what they're calling the Big Chick-CAN, complete with moving beak and turning eyes. The canned goods will go to the Center for Family Resources, or CFR, as they provide Thanksgiving baskets to at least 1,200 needy families in the area. Altogether, Chattahoochee Tech's can drive produced about 6,000 cans.

"You're helping people, helping families that don't have what they need for Thanksgiving," drafting student and team member Eric Poster said. "It's a good program. Growing up we didn't have a lot of money, so I know how it is not having stuff."

The six-student team, ranging in age from 22 to 57, estimate they spent about 1,000 cumulative hours dreaming, designing and building their Big Chicken replica. Construction, a nationwide food charity that holds design and building competitions throughout the country, inspired students to try their own can designs. Although Chattahoochee Tech didn't officially participate in Construction this year, students hope other area schools will be open to holding a competition in Cobb County next year.

Drafting students used math, physics, mechanical skills, and an Auto CAD computer program as they designed and built the chicken. They also built friendships and camaraderie and gained work experience, they said.

Imitating Marietta's own Big Chicken was a way to encourage people to get involved in the project, co-leader Karen Miceli said.

"It was an idea local people could relate to," she said.

The can drive met a real need for CFR, board chairman Debbie Abernathy said. In 2005, more than 35 million people in the U.S. did not have enough food, she said. In 2006, CFR distributed more than 250,000 pounds of food to more than 7,400 people, she said.

"This was a way to take a can drive and make it fun," James Schoon said, an intern architect with the Facility Group who helped the students with their project. The team had specific targets, listing the number and colors of cans they needed to make the chicken. They also worked with a list of Thanksgiving needs from the CFR. Working toward a goal generated more interest in the drive and added energy to the project, Schoon said.

Lucylle Shelton directs service learning at Chattahoochee Tech.

"We're trying to give students a vision of how they can contribute to the community using the skills they have as college students," she said.

Psychology instructor Jodie VanGroev agreed. "It is service, but (we are) tying it into the curriculum."

Ms. Miceli and Preston Morris co-led the team. Other team members were Ruben Matos, Ken Allen, Dianne Griffin, and Poster. Drafting teachers Randal Reid and Charles Stevens also helped with the project.

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