

The Bridge Builder

When Mike Weaver went Christmas shopping last year, he bought dozens of stuffed animals, radio headphones, building blocks, crayons and coloring books, and child-size T-shirts.

They were not for members of his family—at least not blood family. They were for a special family made up of children with only one parent, homeless families, the people who patronize the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A. Shelter for Women and Children or the John Hope University Day Care Center. They were for people Weaver had taken upon himself to help out.

After an internship with the Carver/East Side Boys Club of Atlanta, Weaver felt compelled to put what he had learned to practical use. Hence, the birth of the Atlanta University Center Volunteer Task Force, a group of students who volunteer their assistance at 18 local public schools, recreational centers, shelters and day care facilities in the surrounding community.

Still in its infancy, the task force is growing quickly and currently has 150 participants. When Weaver began his first fund-raising effort, he called it a "loose change campaign" that was to last for only one week and set a very modest goal of \$400.

A year later, Weaver is more sophisticated in his approach. The goal has more than quadrupled to \$2,000, and he has given the task force a month and a half to reach it.

Although all of the money raised last year was given to charity, this year a portion of the money will go toward getting the task force incorporated to make it eligible for government grants and tax-exempt status.

Another portion of the money will go toward the start-up of an emergency funding resource whereby a needy person under an emergency situation can get cash within 24 hours.



Mike Weaver (center) with five of his 26 play brothers: (left to right): Antrell Jones, 14, Barry Michealson, 14, Quenton Rogers, 10, Kentavious Scott, 10, and Donny Howard, 12.

Weaver is committed to the cause of supplying positive black male role models for community children.

"I look back over my life and ask, 'How did I make it?' Where I come from, it was designed for me to be into drugs, sitting around doing nothing, just like most of the friends I left at home," he said.

"The drugs, the loss of hope—all of this is going on here in Atlanta. Somebody has to jump in and stop this."

Weaver, who was raised by his mother and great-grandmother, believes that the presence of positive male role models in his Aiken, South Carolina, neighborhood contributed to his strong character.

As a frequent and popular visitor to the surrounding community—the low-income, crime-ridden public housing complexes of Harris Homes, John Hope University Homes, Eagan Homes and Herndon Homes—he can attest to the schism that exists be-

tween the AU complex and the community.

"The community is nonverbally saying, 'How can you exist and go about your daily duty without helping us . . . when my son is being bombarded with drug pushers? How can you let this happen and how can I respect you?'"

Weaver is welcomed in most of these neighborhoods. His familiar face and encouraging words—and now the Task Force—may be the bridge across the wide gap that separates neighbors who seem to be close only in proximity.

Although financial problems have forced Weaver, a senior computer science major, to sit out of school (he is currently seeking scholarship and loan opportunities), he has kept a firm rein on the operations of the Task Force. Its duty, he said, is too important to let slip.

"We're trying to build a more harmonious community," he explained.