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FEATURED

'Breaking barriers' at National Night Out

By RECORDER STAFF Updated Aug 4, 2016



STAFF PHOTOS BY TAMARA WARD STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH FALLIN

Above, Capt. Todd Ireland of the Calvert County Sheriff's Office hands out goodies to Cornell Johnson, 10, Braylin Johnson, 7, Ja-Kv Kelson, 10, and Nyasia Rice, 5, at Tuesday's National Night Out observance at Prince Frederick Village, Prince Frederick Seniors at Calvertowne Town Homes. The celebration honored community and safety. Right, brothers Kai Smith, 2, and David Garber, 7, read the book they selected on the Calvert Library Mobile Services van. The library was on site promoting literacy and offered each child a book to read. Below, Jaylin Nichols, 4, sports the new fire hat the Calvert County Public Safety officers gave him.

Seventeen Calvert County communities participated in the 33rd annual National Night Out on Tuesday, celebrating with neighbors and helping to strengthen police-community relations as well as crime and drug prevention awareness.

Sponsored by the Calvert Alliance Against Substance Abuse in partnership with the Maryland State Police Prince Frederick barrack and the Calvert County Sheriff's Office, the Calvert events coincided with National Night Out celebrations across the country.

The Queensberry community in northern Calvert celebrated its inaugural year of National Night Out with food, music, entertainment and beneficial information from a plethora of organizations.

From face painting to jumping in the moon bounce, children were entertained and kept busy in the Huntingtown neighborhood. They also had the opportunity to play board games, cards and catch at the event. Good vibes were kept high with a range of different music, along with a brief live music performance from a local group.

CAASA was one of the many organizations present at the event to distribute information on fighting drug abuse, different ways to volunteer and upcoming events.

"I participate in National Night Out for the same reason I participate in CAASA," Debbie Mister, president of the CAASA Board of Directors, said, explaining that her daughter died from a drug overdose in 2011. "That's why I do what I do. It'll be five years [since her death] on Sunday."

The Calvert County Health Department was also present, pushing its public awareness campaign, Act Now Calvert. Information was available regarding breaking smoking habits, contact information for behavioral health resources and upcoming health department events.

Anthony Greene, grant coordinator and outreach worker for the Calvert County Health Department, manned the table Tuesday evening and emphasized the importance of Calvert residents joining the Act Now Calvert Coalition. Greene said the coalition currently focuses on underage and binge drinking.

Some of the other organizations present at the event included Charm of the Chesapeake, Calvert County Fire-Rescue-EMS, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, Primary Residential Mortgage, Huntingtown Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and Calvert Community Crime Watch.

At East-John Youth Center in Lusby, kids enjoyed foosball, French fries and other food and games, and the Solomons Volunteer Rescue Squad and Fire Department and law enforcement officers were on hand to answer questions.

“It’s about getting with kids and showing them the lights and sirens, getting them exposed to law enforcement and fire and rescue personnel,” said Dfc. Gott of the sheriff’s office. “It just breaks down any barriers they may have of first responders, especially at a young age, so they’re not afraid of you when they see you out.”

This was the first National Night Out for the Rev. Brenda Mcilwain, pastor of The Lusby Charge, who also stressed the importance of the community being able to interact in a positive way with law

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“I think it gives us an opportunity to interact with service providers and gives us an opportunity to thank them,” Mcilwain said. “You see so much negative stuff, negative information that’s out there. ... We need police officers. We need firemen.”

She added that kids may discover, through learning more about police and firefighters, that they want to aspire to those professions when they grow up.

At the Chesapeake Ranch Estates clubhouse in Lusby, several National Night Out veterans came out once again to show their support. Laura Wagner brought her children to enjoy the moon bounce and to see law enforcement vehicles.

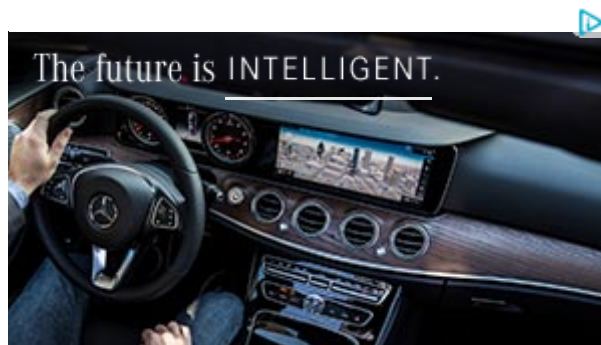
“We do it every year. We love it. ... [I want] to show them it’s OK to get out and do stuff with the community,” Wagner said.

Calvert County Animal Control Officer Fred Sheckels was on hand with his animal control van and said he has attended National Night Out since he moved to Calvert County in 2003. He has served in animal control for 14 years, beginning in Bowie.

Sheckels said National Night Out is especially important to him as it’s during the summer months, so he can educate attendees about the dangers of leaving animals in cars, especially during the summer. Sheckels handed out charts that detail that on a 75-degree day, it only takes 10 minutes for a car to reach 100 degrees, and on a 100-degree day, it takes 15 minutes for a car to reach 140 degrees, leaving unattended animals to suffer brain damage or die of heatstroke.

"I want to educate people about animals, animal care, wildlife," Sheckels said.

While her daughters colored at an activity table, Sarah Hodges explained National Night Out is especially important in the midst of national controversies involving law enforcement.

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"I brought them so they would see, especially with everything going on with law enforcement right now," Hodges said.

The communities of Prince Frederick Village, Prince Frederick Seniors and Calvertowne Town Homes came together on National Night out to fellowship, enjoy food and promote safety.

Within the first hour of the event, more than 50 residents attended, some bearing food for all to enjoy. Property manager Liz Grisso, who is responsible for 100 units in the combined communities, greeted nearly everyone by first name.

This year's celebration focused on getting kids ready to go back to school. A table within the community center held a multitude of backpacks, lunch boxes and all the paper, pencils and pads needed to get the upcoming school year off to a good start. The items were distributed to the community kids, at no cost to them or their parents. Grisso called the multi-page school supply list used to purchase the supplies "redunculous" and was pleased about the opportunity to help the parents by taking one task off their fall to-do list.

Andrea Kelson will put one of those backpacks to good use this fall at the College of Southern Maryland. The English major enjoys coming to the annual National Night celebration.

“We actually get to meet new people. Even though we all live in the same neighborhood, we don’t know a whole lot of people,” shared Kelson.

Outside, kids frolicked on nearby open space or took rightful advantage of the generosity of the Calvert Library Mobile Services, which was on hand to promote literacy. On the book mobile, each child was allowed to pick one book to keep, not borrow. Kids also got jump ropes courtesy of their local library. Other youngsters participated in arts and crafts along with the librarians, who appeared to have just as much fun.

Seniors had the opportunity to get resource information from the Calvert County Commission on Aging and Calvert Health Department.

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Calvert County Public Safety officials attended the event and provided valuable safety information and trinkets for adults and kids alike. Sheriff’s office Capt. Todd Ireland was a big hit among the youngsters, as he came with a bag of goodies to promote fun and drug-free living. For the adults, he had useful tips for safe driving.

Other participating communities included the Bayside Forest, Carroll Western United Methodist Church, College Station, Dares Beach Civic Association, Long Beach and Calvert Beach Civic Association, Patuxent Palisades and Shores of Calvert, Symphony Woods, Victoria Estates and Yardley Hills.