



Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL INITIATIVE & FIRST DAY FESTIVAL

Background & History

What Is First Day?

The First Day of School Initiative is a national campaign to generate widespread community support for schools, excitement about the beginning of another school year and is a celebration of education. The goal is to encourage parents to take their child to school on the first scheduled day, and employers are encouraged to support education by allowing employees time off (paid, unpaid, or flextime) to participate in activities at their children's schools.

The success of the First Day of School Initiative is the result of collaborative partnerships and extraordinary community support. Key partners provide financial, in-kind and volunteer support for the First Day Festival which allows the City to host this event at no cost to families and children. The community has embraced this initiative and established a model of civic engagement in support of education.

The 12th Annual First Day Festival will be held on Sunday, August 17, 2014 at Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium and the Charleston Maritime Center. During the festival, thousands of parents, children, teachers and volunteers will enjoy free school supplies, educational information, healthy foods, entertainment, boat rides and tours of the SC Aquarium. The event provides a holistic educational experience, promoting healthy lifestyles through the interactive food court and environmental efforts. Dedicated to minimizing negative environmental impacts, the First Day Festival makes every effort to be kind to the earth in its operations and offers educational elements regarding sustainable living.

National First Day Initiative

In 1997, the First Day of School was initiated by Hemmings Motor News in Bennington, Vermont. Eleven schools participated. The mission and purpose of First Day of School is to celebrate education by hosting special activities and getting parents to come to school with their children on the first day.

Why It Works?

- Parents begin the school year right, building better relationships with their children's teachers.
- Parents feel supported by their employers.
- Parents feel welcomed by the schools.
- Parents are more comfortable in their children's schools.
- It generates widespread community support.

History of First Day Festival

2003 1st Annual First Day Festival - August 10th

The 1st annual First Day Festival was held on Sunday, August 10, 2003 at Joe Riley Stadium. The City of Charleston learned about the First Day of School Initiative from former Mayor of Nashville, TN, Bill Purcell, who encouraged the City of Charleston to sponsor this event to celebrate education and generate community support for education. Parents, students, and educators were invited for an afternoon of entertainment, free school supplies, and information about student support services. Over 3500 parents and children attended and festival exhibitors focused on providing parents with information on student support services. 32 community-based agencies and 18 school-based programs were on hand to talk to parents and distribute information. Employers were asked to support the initiative by giving employees time off to participate in activities at their child's school.

2004 2nd Annual First Day Festival – August 8th

For the second year, the First Day Festival, moved to Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium and Fort Sumter Museum. The National Park Service and Charleston County School District joined as key partners. An estimated 5,000 parents and children were in attendance. More than 60 organizations participated as exhibitors providing information on student support services. Free school supplies were distributed and a Food Court was added that provided free food and refreshments. A major incentive to attend was an opportunity to visit the SC Aquarium for just \$1.00. Mayor Riley made first day of school a highly visible priority for the City and committed to giving city employees with children in the public schools, two hours off to take their child to school on their first day.

2005 3rd Annual First Day Festival – August 20th

The First Day Festival, Sunday, August 20th at Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium had an estimated 6,000 families and children in attendance. Mayor Riley initiated the First Day Business Honor Roll, recognizing businesses that committed to support the festival or give time off for employees to take their child to school on the first day. The Mayor's First Day Honor Roll included 36 businesses that committed to support the festival. A new feature added this year was free boat rides provided by SpiritLine Cruises, 840 families had the opportunity to cruise the harbor.

2006 4th Annual First Day Festival – August 20th

In 2006, the fourth annual First Day Festival had one of the largest crowds with an estimated 7,000 children and families attending. The SC Aquarium opened its doors for a \$1 admission fee and over 2,600 parents and children toured the aquarium. Trident United Way's Countdown to Kindergarten program and the Junior League of Charleston fingerprinting and child ID project were added to the festival. Eighty nine exhibitors and 200 volunteers participated. Thirty one businesses supported the festival and committed to give time off to employees to take their child to school on the first day. 720 families enjoyed a boat ride and tour of the harbor. An important aspect of the festival was, again, the free school supplies handed out to thousands of children who attended.

2007 5th Annual First Day Festival – August 19th

The 5th annual First Day Festival drew over 7,500 parents and children to Liberty Square. Due to the success and rapid growth of the festival, the Charleston Maritime Center was added to the venue site. There were 92 exhibitors who provided information on student support services. 4,178 children and their families toured the SC Aquarium. For a second year, the Junior League of Charleston and the Charleston Police Department partnered to fingerprint and ID over 300 children. Healthy food and snacks donated by 13 food vendors were available at the Food Court which was coordinated by the Lowcountry Food Bank. Boat rides were provided to 680 people and the South Carolina Maritime Foundation provided free tours of the tall ship, Spirit of South Carolina. The Charleston Angler provided fishing activities for children and parents. The Cooper River Bridge Run donated 5,000 backpacks that were packed with school supplies donated by businesses and organizations that conducted school supply drives. Over 250 volunteers were on hand to help make it a successful experience for children and families who attended.

2008 6th Annual First Day Festival – August 17th

At the 6th annual First Day Festival over 9,000 families and children flocked to Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium and the Charleston Maritime Center. Exhibitors, volunteers, food court vendors, mascots, entertainers, and many others spent the day providing families with the information on student support services, handing out free school supplies, and healthy food and snacks. The SC Aquarium welcomed almost 4,500 children and their families for a free tour. SpiritLine Cruises and the Charleston Harbor Tours gave 850 free boat rides around the Charleston Harbor. The 2008 Mayor's Honor Roll included an impressive 106 businesses. New this year was a focus on reducing waste and going green which resulted in 2,160 lbs. of materials recycled. A First Day Festival logo contest was held to search for a new logo for the festival. Benjamin Ancrum, a rising freshman at Charleston Charter for Math and Science was the contest winner. His design incorporated the words "Celebrate a New Beginning" to symbolize the mission of the festival as well as his own family's "new beginning" in Charleston.

2009 7th Annual First Day Festival – August 16th

The 7th Annual First Day Festival was a record year with over 10,000 children and families attending. There were 83 registered exhibitors participated and over 250 individuals volunteered for the festival and pre-festival activities. Volunteers contributed a total of 1,197 hours of service. 23% of all volunteers were youth and 11% of all volunteers registered the day of the festival. 5,536 children and families went through the SC Aquarium from 1-5 pm. 970 children and families were treated to a boat ride by SpiritLine Cruises and Charleston Harbor Tours. 21 organizations participated by collecting school supplies. Staples donated 6,000 school totes and various school supplies. Over 200 regular school backpacks with supplies were donated by the East Cooper Breakfast Rotary. 94 Honor Roll Partners made commitments to education and the festival. A total of 1,500 pounds of cardboard and 1,260 pounds of bottles and cans were recycled. 16 Food vendors participated in the Food Court. Local chefs from 4 area restaurants conducted cooking demonstrations at the festival. An annual food drive was

added to the festival to raise awareness of hunger and to support local nonprofits such as the Lowcountry Food Bank. Over 412 pounds of food was collected which was enough food to serve 322 meals to the hungry in the Charleston area.

2010 8th Annual First Day Festival – August 17th

Despite the rain and dark clouds, the 2010 First Day Festival welcomed approximately 6,000 students and their families to Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium and the Charleston Maritime Center. 97 Exhibitors provided education and support service information for families and 13 exhibitors provided information on health and wellness. The Mayor's Honor campaign resulted in an increase in the number of businesses, 130 businesses, committed to supporting education and providing in-kind support for the festival. The SC Aquarium welcomed 5,127 children and their families and 220 attendees were able to enjoy a free boat ride. Thousands of students received backpacks filled with school supplies and over 150 volunteers helped make the event a success despite the rain.

2011 9th Annual First Day Festival-August 14th

The 9th annual First Day Festival welcomed over 10,000 students and their families to Liberty Square at the SC Aquarium and the Charleston Maritime Center. The community came together to celebrate education and the beginning of the new school year. Students and families were able to enjoy entertainment, receive school supplies, visit the SC Aquarium, take a boat ride in the harbor, and eat healthy foods. Through the generous support and in-kind contributions of 157 businesses on the Mayor's Honor Roll list, the 2011 First Day Festival was a tremendous success. The Honor Roll Partners encouraged employees to attend the First Day Festival, supported employees taking their children to school by giving them time off, and committed to support education throughout the year by allowing employees time to participate or volunteer at their child's school.

4,780 festival attendees toured the SC Aquarium and 936 attendees were able to enjoy a boat ride the day of the festival. One important part of the First Day Festival was again the school supplies that were handed out to thousands of children. At the Charleston Maritime Center, 14 food vendors at the Healthy Food 4 U venue prepared or served healthy snacks. Parents were able to sign their children up for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. A Food Drive was conducted for the Lowcountry Food Bank and 310 pounds of food were collected. 450 volunteers gave of their time to assist with the First Day Festival.

2012 10th Annual First Day Festival-August 19th

Sunday, August 19, 2012 was a day to remember! After months of planning and the festival grounds ready to welcome children and families, 15 minutes before the kickoff of the festival, it rained on our parade. The rain and windy conditions made it necessary to implement the inclement weather plan and scale back events. Many who attended will remember sloshing through the ankle deep water, soaked to the bone thinking this cannot be happening. Despite the torrential rain and windy conditions, the numbers were impressive. We welcomed an estimated 5,000 students and their families to the First Day Festival who were able to tour the SC Aquarium and receive backpacks filled with school

supplies. The success of the First Day Festival continues to be the incredible support and hard work of the First Day Festival Planning Team, volunteers and First Day Festival partners.

2013 11th Annual First Day Festival – August 18th

The 11th Annual First Day Festival opened its doors to over 10,000 children and families. 97 registered exhibitors participated and were able to share information on education and healthy living. Over 300 volunteers registered for the festival and pre-festival activities dedicating 1,856 hours of service. Between 1-5pm, 6,233 children and families enjoyed free admission into the SC Aquarium. 940 children and families were treated to a boat ride by SpiritLine Cruises and Charleston Harbor Tours. With the help of 41 organizations who collected school supplies and the 105 Honor Roll Partners, 4,000 bags of school supplies were distributed to children at the Festival. The annual food drive collected 200 pounds of food which was enough to serve 154 meals to the hungry in the Charleston area. The tremendous community support allowed this year's Festival to be a huge success. Thank you to all who contributed and we look forward to working with you next year!

2014 12th Annual First Day Festival – August 17th

After weeks of rain, the 12th Annual First Day Festival welcomed the sunshine along with over 10,000 children and families. 63 amazing exhibitors set up at Liberty Square and the Maritime Center, giving away educational information, healthy living tips, and nutritional snacks to all who came. Close to 6,200 attendees also enjoyed free admission into the South Carolina Aquarium while 965 more hopped aboard Charleston Harbor Tours and SpiritLine Cruises for free boat tours. The success of the First Day Festival would not have been possible without the 250 volunteers who worked hard before and during the Festival. With their help, the City of Charleston was able to pack and distribute close to 4,000 bags of school supplies to children throughout the tricounty area. If the School Supply Drive, exhibitor activities, SC Aquarium, and boat tours weren't enough, the Festival was proud to host three amazing performances by Japan Karate Institute, Flip! Gym, and LowCo Suzuki Guitar. While watching these talented groups perform, families were able to snap pictures with Cool Ray of the SC Stingrays and Scrappy of Patriots Point. When the Festival finally came to a close, children and families were prepared to start the first day of school along with our 85 Honor Roll Members. We thank everyone who participated in the 2014 First Day Festival and we hope to see you again next year!

Key Partnerships

The success of the First Day Festival is the result of collaborative partnerships and extraordinary community support. Key partners provide financial, in-kind and volunteer support for the First Day Festival which allows the City to host this event at no cost to families and children. The community has embraced this initiative and established a model of public engagement in support of education.

The Benefits of the First Day Festival

- Teachers feel the greatest benefit to them is that when parents feel welcome starting on day one, they are more likely to be allies instead of adversaries throughout the year.
- Parents, students, teachers and principals begin the year together on a positive note.
- Parent/teacher relationships are stronger, and families become partners with the schools.
- The First Day of School Initiative is an example of a successful public engagement activity that can occur on an ongoing basis to reconnect the community with our schools.

How you can get involved?

The success of the First Day Festival is dependent upon collaborative partnerships and extraordinary community support. Our partners provide financial, in-kind and volunteer support for the First Day Festival. Organizations that show support in one or more of the following ways are recognized on the First Day Festival Honor Roll.

Please help us spread the word of the First Day Festival! There are endless ways you can contribute to this wonderful event, some of which include:

- Becoming a Honor Roll Member with a contribution
- Posting posters and promoting the First Day Festival at your business/organization
- Collecting/donating school supplies for distribution at the First Day Festival
- Volunteering before or the day of the Festival
- Getting involved in our schools -- call us to connect with your neighborhood school

Find out more ways to contribute to the First Day Festival [here!](#)

For more information contact:

Mindy Sturm, Executive Director
Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families
50 Broad Street - Charleston, SC 29401
Office: 843-965-4190 - Fax: 843-965-4192
STURMM@charleston-sc.gov
www.charleston-sc.gov/mocyf

8.18.14