



Keeping the children warm

During a conversation in January 2014 about Macon's unusual freezing temperatures, Hope Hahn Shields '91 learned that eight students in her friend Summer Wellborn's kindergarten class did not have winter coats and that others did not have hats or gloves. "It seemed like all twenty-seven children in the class needed something warm." Immediately, Hope felt inspired to help. She posted on Facebook asking her friends for donations to buy cold weather gear for the children. "The response was fast and incredible. Facebook really lit up." Through the generosity of her friends, Hope purchased coats for the children who didn't have one and hats and gloves for all seventeen boys and ten girls in Wellborn's class. The next day, she personally delivered the goods. "One child tugged on me and said, 'Ms. Hope, thank you so much for my coat.' I leaned down and I kissed him on the nose and said 'You are welcome. You stay warm, ok?'" The next day every student in the class wore his or her new hats, gloves, and coats to school. Hope's mission to keep children warm has

grown over the last two winters. A lifelong resident of Macon, she uses personal contacts to determine articles of clothing, sizes, and quantities that are needed at a particular school. While the children try on a new coat or hat and gloves, Hope tells them that she brought the gifts because "my friends and I want you to be warm." This past winter, Hope received \$6,500 in donations ranging from ten dollars to one hundred dollars, enabling her to buy over 1,300 items. Her Facebook post on January 5, 2016, read, "Today I had the pleasure of giving new warm hats and gloves to twenty-seven kindergarten children. Fourteen needed heavy winter coats (and got them). Thank you to the thirty-three of you that donated so unselfishly. Tomorrow twenty-two more coats are being distributed among three other kindergarten classes." Each child made a thank you note and drew pictures for Hope. "I told them all about my generous friends who paid for their gifts. Thank you isn't enough. It's the BEST feeling."

Between her job as a senior customer representative with Merck & Co., Inc., and spending time with her husband Ken and five-year-old daughter Ella Wade, Hope has a busy schedule. Still, she finds time to plan each step in the process of outfitting students in winter necessities, spending many lunch hours and evenings shopping for the best prices. Using her daughter's interests as a guide, Hope buys items in bright colors and often chooses hats and gloves that feature popular children's characters.

During the warmer months of the year, Macon's children will continue to be on Hope's mind as she searches for sales and prepares for the upcoming winter. She is also in the process of establishing a 501(c)(3) organization so that even more children will feel the warmth of her Golden Heart.