

## Junior League looks to the future

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"The Junior League Inc. believes that the health and welfare of our community is of vital importance to all citizens. We support programs that promote child care in an environment that is safe, loving and developmentally appropriate, all of which are critical factors in ensuring that our community is able to develop to its greatest potential."

While that may seem like a daunting statement, the truth is that the future of our community lies in the hands of our youngest occupants, and until we can say that we truly believe that all of South Carolina's children are entering kindergarten fully prepared, we haven't lived up to preparing for the future. The Junior League goes on to say that "the quality of public education impacts significantly upon the future of our community and the Junior League supports programs that enhance educational opportunities for children."

On one hand, we, as citizens of South Carolina, want to attract businesses to our communities, ones that offer a variety of jobs that are both highly skilled and for laborers, but have we put enough thought into how we will staff these positions in the future? Can we expect to attract competent people to currently fill these positions and move their families here when we don't have a statewide rating system of preschools?

Do we want these companies to be looking overseas or in other states in the future because we in South Carolina are not well-educated enough? Is the average business person even concerned at all with quality preschool education? While the answers to these questions are yet to be determined, the Junior League of Greenville is not content to let these issues lie dormant and unattended.

The Junior Leagues of South Carolina have been and continue to fund, endorse and staff nonprofit organizations whose main focus is the child. Free medical clinics, learning disability centers, YWCAs, Salvation Army camps and drug prevention programs are just a few of the many programs that Junior Leagues implement in an effort to improve the well-being of children.

Not only does the Junior League celebrate the Week of the Young Child this week, but it has a lifelong commitment to the well-being of children, their families and their education. Leagues across the state are doing Child Walks -- visits to preschools that are both good and poor -- to increase awareness and the necessities for both a rating system and quality child-care centers.

Leagues are also doing programs like Kids in the Kitchen that are aimed at teaching at-risk toddlers the importance of healthy eating. Kids on the Block is a puppet program aimed at educating children about physical disabilities, single-parent households, drugs, aggressiveness, etc. What can you do to help not only children but also the betterment of your community?

Many studies have shown that the return on investment in preschool education can be as high as \$17 per \$1 invested now. We've waited long enough in South Carolina in putting the emphasis on preschool education, so that our high-school dropout rate, lowest SAT scores and high teenage pregnancies could be prevented.

Male or female, you, too, can put an emphasis on the importance of preparing all children, no matter what their socioeconomic background, for kindergarten. The Junior Leagues in South Carolina may have a 75-year head start, but it's never too late!