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'Voice of Vols' inspires Holston fundraiser

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The major purpose of the Holston United Methodist Home for Children is to teach the youth "who they are, and whose they are."

Those words opened the annual benefit luncheon at the First United Methodist Church for organization, which has assisted youth suffering through troubled times for more than a century.

Event Chairman Nancy Casson noted that since last year's luncheon, 11 Bradley County youth have been added to the rolls of more than 300 now at the home.

"It's imperative that we support this ministry ... in Greeneville, because we do benefit from it and our kids benefit," Casson said. "We really, really thank them for working with us."

A group of youth from the home performed music which brought both tears and cheers from the audience.

HUMHC Christian Life minister Abel Carrico called the youth from the home "amazing."

"I get to watch every day as Jesus Christ transforms them," Carrico said.

"I see a lot of them get here and they don't know who they are. One of the biggest problems with people in the world today is they just don't know who they are, and whose they are," he said. "When these kids figure out who they are, and whose they are, everything changes."

Carrico said he has seen youth come to the home "time after time, when life is just too hard."

"But, when they are transformed it's like all of a sudden the lights come on and they are different," he said. "The situations can still be hard, but because they are transformed, everything changed."

"When we know who we are, and whose we are, nothing can take that away from us," Carrico said.

Bob Kesling, aka "The Voice of the Vols," lent his familiar voice to the proceedings.

Kesling recalled being a camp counselor in Ohio and seeing a young man with only one leg come to the camp with just a pillowcase in his possession.

"I was going to have him take a lower bunk, but he refused, and scampered up to the top bunk," Kesling recalled.

He said the young man also insisted on playing softball.

"I told him he could be my assistant coach," Kesling said. "He said, 'No. I'm playing.' So, the very first ball that is hit, he sticks out his wooden leg, blocks the ball, picks it up and gets the guy out at first base."

The young man then goes up to bat and "crushes it," Kesling said. "He throws his wooden leg to the side and sprints on one leg to second base faster than the other guys with two legs."

"He was our best athlete, our best swimmer, he sang like a bird, he was our leader and all the kids in our group flocked around him. You would not have thought he had a handicap in his life," he said.

Kesling said anytime he starts to feel sorry for himself, he thinks of that young man.

"There are a lot of those at Holston Home," he said. "There are a lot of kids there who have had bad breaks come their way, but they have a good spirit and they want to make something of their lives, and you have a chance to help them."

Bradley Williams, the president and CEO of Holston Homes, said he was "a proud dad today."

"I am a proud dad of every kid that comes across Holston Home," he said. "When you saw those young men and women sing, I am blessed to know their stories. Sometimes that's hard, but it's a blessing to know their stories."