

BETA CLUB MEMBERS SERVE AT RIFA SOUP KITCHEN IN JACKSON



Above: Students' hands model bracelets with RIFA's mission verse: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).



Above: The CCHS chapter poses in front of the mural that helps to illustrate its purpose.

By Ron Barry

Maybe when you're second, it reminds you of two things: (1) you're still looking up at somebody, so the concept of "service" is easier to communicate; and (2) there's still room for improvement, so motivation shouldn't be a problem.

Neither of those things may have any connection to the reasoning of Dr. John West Harris, who founded the concept of the National Beta Club while a faculty member at Wofford College in South Carolina. But he grew up on a farm (like many Crockett Countians) and therefore had a desire to see students develop effective leadership skills and attain high academic achievement. Harris knew achievers tended to make grades of A and B, and subsequently chose Beta (the second letter of the Greek alphabet) for the name of his new organization.

Since all of this happened in 1934, we can only surmise why he went with "beta."

At any rate, it's still going strong nationally, and Crockett County High School has a chapter. Since the club's motto is "Let Us Lead By Serving Others," the Crockett group put that into action Wednesday by serving at the Regional Inter-Faith Association (RIFA) soup kitchen in Jackson.

The students were complimented on being helpful and doing whatever was asked of them, and completed their service by making a donation to the RIFA food bank.



Above: Crockett Beta Club students prepare to serve lunch at the RIFA Soup Kitchen in Jackson on Wednesday.



Above: Crockett's club also made a donation to RIFA's Food Bank.

Traditionally, Beta Club students are awarded membership based on their grades or test scores and character traits. Each individual school chooses what items they will look at for their chapter's member qualifications. Its purpose is "to promote the ideals of academic achievement, character, leadership, and service among elementary and secondary school students."

The Crockett chapter's advisors are Debbie Hurst, Andy Brady, and Chastity Rodgers. RIFA is a local, faith-based organization that has been part of the Jackson community since 1976. Its vision is to lead and engage the community in the fight against hunger, and its mission is to reach out with the love of Christ to help people in need by providing physical and spiritual nourishment.

The RIFA Soup Kitchen provides hot, nutritious meals every day of the year, including holidays. There is no charge for the meals, and no one is turned away. There are many who get their only meal of the day at the Soup Kitchen, which serves an average of 200 meals daily.

With only one full-time RIFA staff member, the Soup Kitchen relies on more than 1,000 volunteers annually from local churches, service organizations, businesses, schools, and individuals to carry out meal planning, preparation, and serving. All of the food served in the Soup Kitchen is donated from area restaurants, businesses, churches, civic groups, and individuals, who combine to provide some 65,000 pounds of food each year. "Beta" may indicate "second," but Wednesday was Crockett's turn to step up to first place.