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The Hartwell Sun, the Hart County Chamber of Commerce and the Hart County Charter System have partnered to demonstrate how Hart County is truly #ONEHARTBEAT. Each month, a school and a local Chamber of Commerce business will be spotlighted to show how the business and the schools are working together to prepare all students for their futures. This month, Dairy Queen is featured, as this business has been a proven devoted business partner for Hart County schools.

By Anna Hall
Hart Co. Charter System

Mark Seabolt has coined a saying, and it sums him up to a T.

“If we buy local, and we shop local, that also means we need to give local,” said Seabolt, general manager of the Hartwell Dairy Queen franchise.

Seabolt is a living example of this ideology, as he and Dairy Queen are noted supporters of all things Hart County, that definitely includes Hart County Schools.

Be it through athletics or educational scholarships, Seabolt's name can be seen behind the scenes as well as on banners lining the county. While the local Dairy Queen is a known hot spot for breakfast, lunch and dinner, it is far more than a place to grab a cup of coffee, ice cream or a quick meal. It is also a popular gathering place where community members and groups convene and where local students regularly work behind the counter, offering them work experience and opportunities that play into a well-rounded education.

Seabolt estimates nearly 20 percent of his employees are Hart County High School students, a fact he states with pride.

“I was born and raised in Hartwell, and I graduated from Hart County High School,” he said. “Knowing that I can continue to support this school and all of Hart County schools by having these opportunities both for employment and for supporting schools through contributions is something I take seriously and am very proud to do. I love the small town feel of Hartwell and being able to give back to that is a great feeling.”

Being in a position to introduce new employees from his alma mater is something Seabolt starts with students at an early age. It's not uncommon



Sunshot by Michael Hall

Mark Seabolt, general manager of Dairy Queen in Hartwell, talks with first graders at Hartwell Elementary recently.

for him to tour a local school, and teach younger students the value of a dollar. Breaking down for elementary school students, for example, the chain reaction spending a few dollars locally can have overall on the community is a task he takes on with enthusiasm.

“When you think about spending and supporting locally, knowing how far \$2 can go is an interesting way to learn about the economy,” he said. “Even if I simplify it for our younger students, it's fun to show them how a small business works. It's a lesson they can hold on to and hopefully be encouraged to spread as they get older. If they see that when they are older, their money can support our local businesses, then they will likely contribute locally when they are older. It just amplifies our local spirit.”

On a recent tour of Hartwell Elementary School, also a school Seabolt attended, principal Lydia Bennett walked him through the hallways, showing off wings which weren't there when he attended. But upon entering the historic building, reminders of his former days in the hallway there struck a chord with him.

“Wow, this brings back memories,” Seabolt said, as

he stepped on a creak in a section of decades-old wooden floor. “That creak has been there since I was a kid here.”

Learning about the upcoming renovations planned for the elementary school, starting this summer, Seabolt was pleased to know the wooden floor would remain intact, though it would be slightly updated. Having two children who walked the same halls of the school's, with one more to enter Hartwell Elementary next year, Seabolt was again struck by the importance of holding tight to his hometown, pouring support into its educational outlets, and knowing the benefits of his effort will be seen for generations to come.

“This is where it all starts, here, in these schools, where students develop those social skills they will need in middle and high school, and then in the real world,” he said. “I see it here in this school, students showing positive behavior in the hall as they walk to lunch and interact with each other.”

As Bennett noted on their tour, all of Hart County schools follow a Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) model, and follow the social-emotional learning pathway known as


the 7 Mindsets. In the long run, students will go from grade level to grade level, eventually graduating and entering into the local community as individuals employable to businesses such as his.

“It really all comes full circle,” Seabolt said. “Good schools make for good adults and good employees. That's why I am grateful I have a way I can give back to our schools and ultimately support our community.”

As his catch phrase denotes, local spirit is something Seabolt takes to Hart ... make that, heart. Be it being part of a local booster club, supporting school bands and sports teams, or offering an extra hand when needed, Seabolt injects his positive attitude into each venue when and wherever needed. When it comes to holding true to the #OneHartBeat ideal, Seabolt is a prime example of what this hashtag is all about- supporting the ideals of local energy and bring a spark to the daily lives of the community.


“I love this town,” he said. “I love the people here and they support me, so of course I am going to turn around and support them however I can. That's what community is all about.”

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