

# Cy-Hope gives community members a helping hand

**By Chevall Pryce**  
STAFF WRITER

A group of community members were shocked to learn a few years ago that a significant percentage of Cy-Fair ISD students were economically disadvantaged — a realization that spurred them into action.

Now, Cy-Fair ISD students have an extra support system behind them, with access to food and extra tutoring, thanks to Cy-Hope, a nonprofit organization with the mission of providing solutions and aid for at-risk students attending Cy-Fair ISD schools.

Lynda Zelenka, executive director of Cy-Hope, said the organization was formed in 2011 after concerned citizens in the community realized a large percentage of students were at a disadvantage. According to the Cy-Fair ISD State of the District Fact Sheet for the 2010-11 school year, 45 percent of students qualified as economically disadvantaged.

“We thought, ‘There have got to be some gaps,’” she said. “We started rallying the community and community influencers together, and the school district, and seeing what the needs are.”

Located at 12715 Telge Rd in Cypress, Cy-Hope offers



Cy-Hope

## Cy-Hope volunteers help with the organization's Larry Dierker Celebrity Golf Tournament.

a plethora of programs for students to use, including a weekend meal program, counseling services, sports teams and more.

Initially, Cy-Hope began serving students meals with the Backpack Program, which sends qualifying students home with a backpack full of food for the weekend when school is not in session.

Currently, volunteers and organizations can sign up to bring the lunches to specific schools. Zelenka said the program was the flagship program for Cy-Hope.

“It started with the backpack program and then

child, Cy-Hope also offers Dierker's Champs. Directed by former Houston Astros pitcher and manager Larry Dierker, the program comprises baseball teams and works to develop athletic skills. Counseling services are also available through Cy-Hope, as well as programs such as Ambassadors of Compassion, a life coaching program and Devine Virtuozos, a music summer camp and instruction program. Calbat said students in the Cy-Fair area can receive help for the entirety of their education in the district.

“They can start out with us in elementary and throughout their whole entire school years there are programs that we can provide for them,” she said. “It really is a holistic approach to providing hope to kids. Not just one little piece of their life, but all of their life.”

Cy-Hope also has a resale shop, the Hope Chest, where people can purchase and donate secondhand items while supporting Cy-Hope directly. Cy-Hope owns a replica Alamo, available for rent and events, as well as the Hope Lodge, a log cabin which is also available for rental.

“Rental income of our venues is starting to become another way that we

are helping to sustain our programs as well as share our beautiful piece of property with the community,” Calbat said. “Between private donations, a few grants, our fundraisers, our resale market, our counseling center and our venue rentals, those are our income producers.”

Several community entities support Cy-Hope year round through partnerships and funding including the Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce, CFISD, Cy-Fair Women's Club, LEAD Cypress and more Zelenka said. Although Cy-Hope has many resources to complete their mission, the organization is still looking to take care of the community members they have not reached yet.

“When we drive around the community, we have blinders on,” Zelenka said. “When I took those blinders off, it looks a lot different than what we perceive. I think that's a perception a lot of people in greater Houston have, that we're a bedroom community. There are pockets of affluence, but there are so many pockets of poverty. They are our neighbors and we want to make a difference and give them not a hand out, but a hand up.”