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a lifetime of sight for all Georgians,  
especially children and seniors,  
through vision screenings,  
eye exams, and education.*

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Barbara Myers, 770-309-0613

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Georgia Baptist Nursing Students Lend a Hand*  
**Lilburn Children Benefit from Efforts of Prevent  
Blindness Georgia Volunteers**

Atlanta, GA (November 16, 2007) - Many pre-kindergarten children at Seven Oaks Academy in Lilburn are excited about seeing and learning now, thanks to a group of Prevent Blindness Georgia volunteer screeners and a very persistent school resource coordinator.

Earlier this year, Prevent Blindness Georgia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the sight of the residents of Georgia, trained students at Georgia Baptist College of Nursing at Mercer University, Atlanta, to conduct preschool vision screenings. Fourteen of these nursing students traveled to Seven Oaks Academy to screen the school's pre-kindergarten children. Of the 89 children screened for vision problems, 19, or a whopping 21 percent, were referred to an eye care professional for further testing and help.

Then, Mika Patel, resource coordinator for Seven Oaks' pre-K program, took the next step of encouraging and prodding parents to take their children to the eye doctor. Her polite relentlessness paid off - twelve students visited an eye doctor.

"Our efforts to get help for these children might have ended right there if it had not been for Mika," says Laurie Irby, director of children's programs at Prevent Blindness Georgia. "We screen children at 750 schools each year, and not many resource coordinators take it upon themselves to follow up to the extent that Mika did. Few, if any, of these children would have been taken to the eye doctor without Mika's prodding."

These students at Seven Oaks Academy are another success story for Prevent Blindness Georgia. Of the 19 students flagged for further testing, ten are now wearing glasses. Three of the ten were found to have amblyopia, reduced vision in

455 East Paces Ferry Road, Suite 222, Atlanta, GA 30305-3319  
(404) 266-0071 (800) 477-4448 FAX (404) 266-0860 [www.pbga.org](http://www.pbga.org)

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one eye that is also known as “lazy eye.” Another child was diagnosed with hyperopia and astigmatism but doesn’t need glasses yet.

“It is so important for us to screen children at ages four and five,” says Jenny Pomeroy, CEO of Prevent Blindness Georgia. “The children are young enough that their vision can be corrected, thus avoiding many behavior problems in school that interrupt their learning and that of other children in the class. But, because they are so young, they are often unaware that their distorted vision is not normal. They are unlikely to complain, and screenings are often the only way to catch the problems in a timely manner unless parents and teachers notice unusual behaviors — children rubbing their eyes or getting really close to their books or TV sets.”

After some initial reluctance, the youngsters at Seven Oaks Academy are proud of their new glasses and excited about being able to see and learn. And their teachers can link major changes in their behavior to the new glasses. One teacher noticed that some children had been attentive and well-behaved in small group activities, but easily distracted and inattentive in large group activities. One child copied another student’s work, not caring if it was correct. Another child squinted, rubbing her eyes and getting up from her seat to get closer to the tablet she was trying to copy, while a third frequently stared off into space and acted out, doing no work at all.

The behavior problems are gone now and replaced by smiles and eagerness to participate. And the little boy who acted out? According to his teacher, he is a model student. “He is happier and more confident because he sees the numbers and letters better,” she says. “He even tells me, ‘I can spell the days of the week on the wall without help. I can see the letters with my glasses.’”

*Prevent Blindness Georgia was founded in 1965 as the state affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the nation’s leading volunteer eye health and safety organization since 1908. Its mission is to prevent blindness and preserve sight for the residents of Georgia through vision screening for children and adults, eye exams and glasses for indigent seniors and homeless and working poor adults, public education on eye health and safety to persons at risk for eye disease, and vision screening training.*

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