

School backpack giveaway a summer treat

It's that time of year. School starts are upon us. Unfortunately, many students will not have what they need for the classroom.

But local businesses are working to change that with a collaborative community sponsored school supply drive that equips local youth in need.

Just in time for school, three local elementary schools are outfitted with backpacks and school supplies offered by Conway Lakes Health & Rehab Center's long-term residents, staff and business partners.



The event, now in its fourth year, has given away more than 650 backpacks to help children successfully begin the school year with better preparedness.

The backpacks were a treat for many children on Tuesday, August 13th and there was an added bonus: The bags weren't empty. It came with an assortment of business donated paper, pencils, and crayons.

Student volunteers from Winter Park High School ROTC program helped to fill the bags and then assisted senior residents to give backpacks to Ventura and Azalea Elementary school children attending the event. For transport strapped children at

Killarney Elementary, 100 bags were delivered there August 13th for their needs.

According to the National Retail Federation, the average household with school-aged children will yearly spend \$95.44 on school supplies. There are nearly 16 million children in the U.S. that live in poverty. Not being able to afford the basic supplies and equipment, like pencils and paper, can put students at risk for failure, reports U.S. Department of Education.

Research makes the case that preparing students early on will set them up for success in school, work and life, according to the HighScope Perry Preschool study. Their study shows that investing \$1 in a child's success saves \$17 down the road, with tangible results measured in lower crime, fewer single parents, and higher individual earnings and education levels.



“I don’t know who has the best time at our yearly event,” says Matt File, administrator for Conway Lakes Health & Rehab Center, “Our residents or the kids.” File says that many elderly long-term residents aren’t mobile in the community, “So, when the community comes to us it is a real treat for everyone involved,” he says.

File says that some of his residents are retired teachers. “They’ve donated their time, resources and energy to our project of helping local children get ready for school and they really look forward to this annual event,” he says.

It’s been a festive tradition since 2009. This year hot dogs, drinks, snacks, face painting and clowns were added and provided for fun.

“The event gets bigger each year. We’ve actually doubled our annual backpack giveaway program and our goal is to increase awareness to our local businesses of the many ways they can support our “Back to School Bash,” says Lillian Bell, business office manager for Conway Lakes Health & Rehab Center.

“It takes everyone in the community to create a brighter future,” says File. “Your contribution is an investment in children, and together we can achieve lasting results.”

For more information on how to help “Back to School Bash,” call Lillian Bell at 407-384-8838. Conway Lakes Health & Rehab Center offers comprehensive rehabilitative outpatient and inpatient services for short or long term care and is located at 5201 Curry Ford Rd., Orlando, FL 32812