

AMHERST BULLETIN

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Project Backpack gives good weight

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A simple project launched five years ago by an Amherst school department employee is today a communitywide effort that gets classes started in, well, a classy way.

For parents, “back to school” also means back to the wallet. Shopping for supplies is part of the end-of-summer ritual, and financial analysts are already reporting on sales, since this shopping provides a significant boost to the economy. It does that by moving money from family budgets to retailers and on up the chain.

Marta Guevara knows that back-to-school shopping can be a strain for families — if it is possible at all. Five years ago, she began collecting backpacks and filling them with things students of different ages need to return to school.

Today, crowds are sourcing those supplies, as a bevy of local groups helps the school department to provide backpacks to income-eligible students.

Before school, students will be able to pick up these free supplies, enabling them to show up on the first day as ready as everyone else to put their brains to work on a new year’s challenges. The kits include obvious things like assignment books, notebooks, dictionaries, atlases and pens, as well as many other school needs.

Among those helping Project Backpack are the Amherst Education Foundation, the Amherst Club, the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, AmherstMedia, the Amherst Police Department, DeMaio Orthodontics, Interfaith Opportunities Network (ION), the Jones Library and the United Way of Hampshire County. That’s an impressive list and all who help are making a real contribution.

Debra Scherban describes how the project works in a story on Page A2 of this week’s Bulletin. It notes that families that wish to request a backpack should contact Kimberly Stender, the school system’s volunteer coordinator, at 362-1825. The story also describes how community members can join the effort.

Last year, students received 700 backpacks with supplies. The project had prepared 500 earlier this week and was aiming high — setting a goal of having 900 backpacks ready for distribution Aug. 22 and 23 at the Amherst Regional Middle School.

It is a simple, heartfelt effort. When recipients don those backpacks, they’ll feel this caring community’s belief in their value — and hope for their success.