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Families Benefit from Back-to-School Backpack Giveaway



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke organized the third annual Backpack Giveaway July 29 at Foss Park. Burke: "It's a small token of our commitment to our kids."

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School kids and their parents began lining up at sunrise at Foss Field Park in Perris, eager to obtain a new backpack loaded with school supplies like pens, pencils, paper and rulers.

Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke helped organize and supervise the third annual backpack giveaway July 29, along with Tracey Holcomb of the non-profit agency Life Lifters International and a couple dozen other volunteers from area businesses, schools and community organizations.

When it was all over, 1,100 backpacks were dispensed to students from kindergarten to high school seniors.

"It's so important to help provide students the materials they need to succeed in school," Burke said as dozens of children and their families walked by her picking up backpacks. "It's great to be able to serve kids and their parents. It's a small token of our commitment to our kids."

Several parents said they mark their calendars to make sure to attend the backpack giveaway. Many arrived hours before the official start of the event at 10 a.m. By 6 a.m. more than 60 people waited in line.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas chats with event organizer and volunteer Tracey Holcomb. Vargas praised the efforts of the community and organizers to supply needy Perris families with educational materials.

School backpacks cost from \$20 to \$50 and many Perris families include three or more children. So school supplies can take a big bite out of a modest household budget. Burke said she hit upon the idea of giving away backpacks while shopping for school supplies for her own family. She noticed deeply discounted backpacks which looked and worked flawlessly but were deemed out of fashion.

Working with merchants like Sam's Club and others, Burke purchased and received donated backpacks from the community and, in 2015, organized the first back-to-school giveaway. Counting this year, more than 3,000 students have received backpacks, coming from as far away as Murrieta and Victorville for the supplies.

"It's truly become a regional event," Burke said. "It's a small investment that yields a very big return. We're committed to our residents. We're committed to our region."



Volunteers supervise the line of school students receiving backpacks at Foss Field Park, where 1,000 kindergarteners through high-school seniors picked up school supplies for the coming year.

Praise and thanks

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas dropped by the giveaway and heaped praise on Burke for organizing the event.

"Many prompts to Councilwoman Burke," Vargas said. "It's a great event that fills a need, as many kids go without the necessary school supplies."

Vargas said he also was impressed by the number of volunteers who pitched in to lend a hand. Ebere Amadi, 17, vice-president of the City's Youth Advisory Committee, was among those volunteering at the backpack giveaway.

"Backpacks are some of the things school kids need most," said Amadi, a senior at the California Military Institute. "I appreciate the City for organizing this event and for doing a great service for the people of Perris. I know that I am helping the kids of Perris and they will be better off for it."

Rod Jones and his grandson, Jhcoris, 8, a third-grader at Railway Elementary School, picked up a backpack at Foss Park. Jones coaches youth football in Perris and his grandson plays basketball at the Bob Glass Gym.

"I love the City of Perris," Rod Jones said. "It's a very caring community."



Perris mom Janet Parga with her children after receiving backpacks and others school supplies. From left: Vincent, 11; Sonny, 9; Omar, 9, and Deluna, 3.

Helping children and parents

Janet Parga's four children—Vincent, 11, twin brothers Sonny and Omar, 9, and daughter Deluna, 3—all received backpacks. Mom said she was grateful. This year marked the third time Parga and her family have taken advantage of the school supply giveaway.

"Buying school supplies is expensive for me," Janet Parga said. "This is a big help. Thanks to the City of Perris for helping children and their parents. This is something we look forward to."

Laura Guzman, who came to Foss Park to equip her four children for school thanked the City for easing the financial burden parents like her face every time the start of classes rolls around. Her children Mike, 9, Chelsea, 7, Edwin, 6, and Katelynn, 4, stocked up for the new school year beginning in a few weeks.

"I am happy because the City helps us equip our kids for school," Laura Guzman said.



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