



# The Times Record

Think locally.

Midcoast Maine's Only Daily Newspaper

## Need still there to feed hungry children

### Bath BackPack Program welcomes volunteers, donations

BY DARCIE MOORE

Times Record Staff



*VOLUNTEERS WITH THE Bath Area Backpack Program place food into bags to go home with children who are in need of nutritious food over the weekend during the school year. (contributed photo)*

As the Bath Area Backpack Program, which provides meals to local families, marks its second year, those who founded the nonprofit are finding demand for its services continues to grow.

The program was founded by Bath United Methodist Church members who had ties to the local schools, and who had witnessed food insecurity in Bath firsthand. Among those was Irving Ouellette, who helped get the program going in 2014 along with his wife, Brenda.

The issue is that some children come to school without eating over the weekend, and many don't eat food that is nutritious or helpful, Ouellette said.

The Bath Backpack Program partners with the Good Shepherd Food Bank, which Ouellette said has about 100 programs in the state. The church group worked to raise enough money before launching the program to keep it sustainable, he said.

They started two years ago aiming to feed 10 children.

“The principal said she got 45 kids” that first year, Ouellette said.

“We just went out in the community and talked to people, businesses, went to banks, and the response was overwhelming,” he said. When people find out kids in Bath are hungry, they want to help. Every dollar raised buys the program \$7 worth of food through Good Shepherd.

Brenda Ouellette heads up the volunteers, which over the last school year involved nearly 50 people logging more than 500 hours receiving, sorting, packing and delivering the backpacks and pantry food to three Bath area schools.

The fledgling program this last school year served more than 90 children, up from approximately 65 the first year and has expanded to cover Fisher-Mitchell, Bath Middle School and Phippsburg

Elementary School. Next year, they were expanding to the school in West Bath.

Ouellette said the program is anonymous and volunteers don't know who the food goes to. The school identifies the children in need of weekend meals who are food insecure and someone packs the sealed bags of food into the children's backpacks.

The food students carry home is for them, but if the school knows of a sibling or family member at home also in need, they may send food home for them as well.

The food bags must be limited to five pounds and follow nutrition guidelines that Good Shepherd Food Bank uses. They also include information for families about healthy eating and recipes, Ouellette said.

Volunteers are always needed to make the program possible, and Ouellette said the monthly packing times should kick off again at the end of August. It has turned into a social event for many in the community.

A pilot pantry program was also started at Bath Middle School and Phippsburg Elementary School. Pantry programs allow some children to select from an assortment of nutritious, easy to prepare food items for weekends and school vacations.

Children served by the program are among those who receive free and reduced lunch in the four schools — between 43 percent and 68 percent — the highest in the Midcoast region. Nearly 150 donors and 30 churches and organizations have continued to respond to the need.

The goal for this year's financial campaign, set to kick off in late August, is \$25,000. These funds will provide backpacks and pantry food for up to 100 children in four Bath area schools and help the program expand to the West Bath Elementary School this fall.

"The Bath Area BackPack Program is having a positive effect on the area schoolchildren," a press release states. "As one second-grade girl stated, 'My family really likes the whole wheat pasta and the healthy food and it helps because our family has trouble getting a lot of food because things are so expensive.'"

Volunteers are needed to assist with monthly backpacking during the school year and for the biannual fundraising campaigns. For more information, call (207) 443-4707 or contact volunteer coordinator Brenda Ouellette at [craftynannyo@gmail.com](mailto:craftynannyo@gmail.com) or 802-673-2759; or write BABPP, P.O. Box 1155, Bath, ME 04530.

Donations may be sent to the same address, or mailed or hand delivered to Bath Savings Institution. Write Bath BackPack Program in the memo line and mail or deliver to 107 Front St., Bath, ME 04530.

Look for the BABPP booth in City Park during Bath Heritage Days. Visit Bath BackPack Program on Facebook.