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## Kiwanis Club donates 100 backpacks to Chippewa Valley

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Photo by Donna Agusti

**Damarion Stamps, a third-grader at Clinton Valley Elementary School, takes a peek inside his new backpack.**

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — One hundred students in Chippewa Valley Schools will now have the tools they need each day when they come to school, thanks to a generous gift from one local community group.

The Clinton Township Kiwanis Club recently donated backpacks filled with school supplies to elementary school students in both Chippewa Valley and New Haven Community Schools. According to Mark Kleinhenz, president of the 34-member club, 100 of the backpacks went to Chippewa Valley and 50 went to New Haven.

“The backpack program has gone over very well so far,” he said. “One of our members brought this up a few years ago as a possible cause for us. We thought it would be a great way to give back to the community and help out some kids at our local schools.”

Kiwanis Club member Bill Lakin noted that the program, now in its second year, uses money that the club brings in during fundraisers throughout the year to pay for backpacks and school supplies for underprivileged students. Last year, the club donated backpacks to Chippewa Valley and L’Anse Creuse Public Schools, but when L’Anse Creuse had a surplus of them this time around, the club decided to include New Haven instead.

“There are a lot of families in our community that are still struggling,” Lakin said. “We became aware through some of our club members who work at schools that there are a number of students in this area who can’t afford basic school supplies.”

In Chippewa Valley, the 100 backpacks were distributed between Cherokee, Clinton Valley, Fox, Miami and Ottawa elementary schools. Thirty of them went to Clinton Valley, where, as principal Greg Finlayson pointed out, about 60 percent of its 360 students receive free or reduced lunches.

“There’s definitely a big need for this here,” he said. “Our school is very grateful to the Kiwanis Club for reaching out to our students and families. Like everyone else, (our teachers) send out a school supply list every year, but realistically, we know that a lot of our families can’t afford to get them all. So this is a great donation that is certainly well appreciated.”

Finlayson was especially impressed by the wide array of school supplies contained within each backpack. The materials included “everything you can think of,” he said, from basic pencils, paper, crayons and notebooks to more expensive and specialty items like calculators, protractors and tape.

As Kleinhenz explained, “These backpacks are designed to give students everything they need to start the school year off right.”

While Clinton Valley had not yet distributed all of its backpacks at press time, Finlayson said, the handful of kids who received them “had grins from ear to ear.” Finlayson and his staff still have to figure out which students have the greatest need and distribute the rest of the backpacks accordingly.

“A lot of our families are really good about making sacrifices to give their kids the things they need,” he said. “So they can provide school supplies for their kids, but sometimes that means they have to go without fixing their car. But then for some, school supplies get pushed aside for other priorities.”

Fox Elementary School was at a similar stage in the process as Clinton Valley. Principal Frank Bellomo stated that it would take some time to determine which students would most benefit from the 15 backpacks that his school received.

“It’s awesome that the Kiwanis Club was able to make this donation,” he said, “and we’re really grateful for their support. We’re very happy that we were chosen for this program.”

Bellomo pointed out that even though Chippewa Valley is a relatively affluent district, it still has pockets of underprivileged students who could use this type of boost.

“It doesn’t matter what school or what district you’re in — there will always be kids in need of assistance,” he said. “We have a lot of students who come from struggling families, so (their parents) have to worry about putting food on the table and giving them clothes to wear before they worry about school supplies. Sometimes these things that we take for granted can be a huge gift for families in need.”

Lakin and Kleinhenz hope that the Kiwanis Club can make these backpack donations an annual tradition. With a reliable place to store all the school supplies at their disposal — AcuSeal, Kleinhenz’s business in Clinton Township — and the need among students not going away anytime soon, the program appears on track to become exactly that.

“We’re definitely going to continue this program every single year,” Kleinhenz said. “Nothing feels better than watching these kids walk out of school carrying one of our backpacks.”

For more information, visit [www.clintontownshipkiwanis.org](http://www.clintontownshipkiwanis.org).

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