

Homeless student charities organize back-to-school drives



Toys”R”Us stores in Madison Heights, Roseville and Sterling Heights are accepting donations of school supplies to benefit the Macomb Intermediate School District Homeless Education Project until Sept. 1. Photo courtesy of MARY LEBIODA

By Nicole Tuttle , **For The Macomb Daily**

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Donations of backpacks and school supplies for the Macomb Intermediate School District Homeless Education Project will be accepted at three local Toys”R”Us stores until Sept. 1. Photo courtesy of MARY LEBIODA

School supplies, backpacks and clothes are among the back-to-school essentials students need to start their school year, items that homeless parents frequently find beyond their budgets.

With a total of 1,618 homeless students in Macomb County based on last school year’s numbers, the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) Homeless Education Project and the Macomb Charitable Foundation (MCF) are both aware of the urgent needs as the school year approaches. MCF President Shelly Penzien said that outside of Christmas, back-to-school time is the time of greatest need for homeless children.

“This is the next busiest time for us,” Penzien said.

With this in mind, both the MISD and MCF have events to help fill the need.

A Golfers for Students fundraiser will be held Friday to benefit the MISD Homeless Education Project. The golf outing, sponsored by Delta Kappa Gamma – Omega Chapter, begins with an 8 a.m. shotgun start at Sycamore Hills Golf Club in Macomb Township.

The chapter consists of female educators from the L’Anse Creuse, Mount Clemens, New Haven and Chippewa Valley school districts. Delta Kappa Gamma – Omega Chapter Fundraising Chair Pat Andrewes said the chapter is hoping to raise between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for the MISD Homeless Education Project.

The MISD Homeless Education Project is also working in partnership with local Toys”R”Us locations to sponsor a Stuff-A-Bus fundraiser.

“One of our board members at the MISD connected me with them. So we have busses at three locations. Folks can make donations during store hours,” MISD School Health and Related Services Consultant Mary Lebioda said.

Toys”R”Us stores accepting the donations include Madison Heights at 23700 John R. Road, Roseville at 32070 Gratiot and Sterling Heights at 13801 Lakeside Circle until Sept. 1. New backpacks and school supplies can be placed in boxes located at Toys”R”Us stores. Some of the most needed items include elementary school level scissors, markers and binders or loose-leaf college ruled paper for older students, Lebioda said.

School supplies can also be accepted at the MISD, as well as socks and hygiene items, by contacting Lebioda at mlebioda@misd.net.

A local Girl Scout troop and students from Macomb County schools will assist with packing the backpacks, according to Lebioda.

The MCF is partnering with the Central Macomb Optimist Club and Macomb County Sheriff’s Office for the 10th annual Shop with the Sheriff event on Aug. 27 at Meijer, located on 26 Mile Road and Van Dyke in Washington Township. The event begins at 9:30 a.m. Each child receives \$100 to shop for clothing and supplies.

Penzien said 150 children will be assisted through the Shop with the Sheriff event.

“Our tried and true process is the first 150 to respond. We start going through the list and start with the homeless families, and call them. It is often difficult to reach families,” Penzien said, adding homeless families are frequently transient and often change phone numbers.

Central Macomb Optimist Club President Pat Rabaut Miller said that families in need shop with volunteers from the club, the MCF and or a Macomb County Sheriff’s deputy.

The MCF has also received support for the Shop with the Sheriff event from St. Peter Lutheran Church and School in Macomb Township and Independent Thirty-One Consultant Stephanie Gorecki. Gorecki conducted a fundraiser during July in which \$15 donations were used to purchase new lunch thermals from Thirty-One Gifts. Eighty-eight thermals were collected and donated to MCF, according to Gorecki.

“They collected school supplies though St. Peter Lutheran Church Vacation Bible School, and I picked up those school supplies and I purchased additional ones,” Gorecki said.

St. Peter Lutheran Church and School is collecting new backpacks for the MCF to be given out at the Shop with the Sheriff event. The backpacks are paired with the lunch thermals and school supplies at the Shop with the Sheriff event, Penzien said. Jackie Wangelin, a St. Peter member coordinating the backpack program, said that donations of new backpacks are accepted at the church offices during regular office hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Aug. 26.