

1,500 free backpacks with supplies to be distributed to Port Arthur ISD kids on Saturday

Published 12:40 am Thursday, July 28, 2022

By Monique Batson



Christine Alpon, from left, Paul Hulin and Johnny Hulin prepare school supplies Wednesday at the Willie Carter Outreach Center. (Monique Batson/The News)

For 22 years, the Willie Carter Outreach Center has been providing free backpacks and school supplies to Port Arthur students.

But with COVID-19 and inflation a current concern, Saturday's event is providing more than just relief for the children.

"A parent shouldn't have to decide whether or not they're going to pay a bill this month or not pay a bill," said Johnny Hulin, executive director of the center. "Because of the food insecurities, they don't have to shuffle their limited budgets to try to prepare the kids for the start of a new school year. This is an opportunity to give the kids something brand new — some of them haven't seen that. It gets them excited about the start of the school year, and the parents won't have to stretch the limits of their budgets."



Darren Anderson helps prepare supplies for the 22nd annual Back to School Backpack Drive. (Monique Batson/The News)

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday on Gilham Circle, the center will hand out 1,500 new backpacks filled with supplies. Previously, the event was held at the Carl A. Parker Multipurpose Center, but during the height of COVID, volunteers dropped backpacks off at 16 campuses for administrators to hand out.

Last year it was moved to a drive-through format, and Hulin said with COVID currently on the uptick, they opted to keep it that way this year.

And Saturday they will also be joined by other community and civic organizations passing out supplies and sack lunches, and New Beginning Ministries will be nearby to hand out free underwear and socks.

“This will get them through at least the first six weeks of the school year, and 1,500 kids will be just like their classmates,” Hulin said. “They’ll start school with all their supplies.”
But, he added, it also benefits educators.



Johnny Hulin, executive director of the Willie Carter Outreach Center, shows one of 1,500 packets that will be given in new backpacks to Port Arthur students Saturday. (Monique Batson/The News)

“I believe it will help with some of the discipline problems,” Hulin said. “If a kid doesn’t have a new uniform or new school supplies, then their attitudes and behaviors can be a lot worse. This way at least they can be excited about going to school with a brand-new backpack.”

The program takes six months to organize, with at least one month spent solely on filling backpacks.

The Carter Center, located at 548 W. 11st Street, has been operating since 2000 with the primary goal of providing free recovery support services to those with substance use or mental health disorders.

They help those in need navigate certain challenges, such as readjusting to society after prison or clinical treatment and even finding employment.

They also operate with a great deal of volunteers, and this year’s Back to School event was made possible with the help of 15 sponsors, from area refineries to utility companies.

And in addition to the 1,500 free backpacks, the center is sponsoring 10 children residing at Port Cities Rescue Mission, a Port Arthur-based emergency housing shelter, with uniforms and supplies.

“This is the greatest blessing I have — to see the smiles on their faces and see their fresh supplies — it’s just wonderful,” Hulin said. “And with our community partners all taking part, it turns out to be a great event.”

For more information, call 409-982-1387.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Willie Carter Outreach Center.