

Officials fill 200 backpacks with school supplies for needy children

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About 30 Gilbert town employees gathered Monday to fill 200 backpacks with school supplies for needy children.

Mike Rudolph, a Gilbert fire captain and vice president of Gilbert firefighters' union, said the backpacks stuffed with school supplies and water and fire safety information were delivered to the Gilbert Community Action Programs office.

The Gilbert Employee Communication Committee started the school-supply drive, and in 2005 the East Valley Firefighters Charities Local 2260 took responsibility for the program.

"It's just a great way to give back," Rudolph said. "Gilbert prides itself on education. It's nice to know that every kid will be taken care of."

Rudolph said the union is able to purchase hundreds of backpacks because JanSport gives the union a steep discount. And Gilbert town employees, he said, supply the manpower to organize the drive.

"The involvement from the top to the bottom - council members, the fire chief, police chief and employees - it's just a real team effort," he said.

Rudolph said local teachers also play a part in the drive by recognizing needy students who would benefit from the program and referring them to the Gilbert Community Action Program.

Councilwoman Linda Abbott, a government teacher at Mesquite High School, said she is glad she can help with the drive and thinks the program is a worthy cause that will make a lot of kids happy.

"Being a teacher, you're fully aware of the needs that some kids have," she said. "Those kids that are challenged by not having money, this is a great opportunity to make sure that every kid starts out at least evenly."

Mayor Steve Berman was on hand to help out.

"My family was underprivileged when I was a kid," Berman said. "It's tough when you're a kid not having things for school. I just think it's wonderful our employees are doing this."

To donate to next year's school-supply drive, e-mail mrudolph@unitedmesaff.com.