

Students reap benefits

BY DENISE SHERMAN, STAFF WRITER

KNIGHTDALE — Every Friday, 35 students stop in the office at Hodge Road Elementary School and pick up a special backpack.

It's loaded with food to meet their nutritional needs and supplement the food supply at home over the weekend. This is the Backpack program of the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina.

"The kids love getting their backpacks every Friday," said Juanita Jones-Hall, the assistant principal at Hodge Road. "I know they feel proud to be in the program."

The program started four years ago through a partnership between the Food Bank and the Hodge Road PTA to help families who need supplemental food over the weekend. The Junior League of Raleigh funded it.

It provides nutritious meals with a protein, canned fruits and vegetables and fruit juice, multigrain bars, individual boxes of cereal and pudding cups.

The program has ballooned to 24 sites in 10 counties. The program now supports 850 children. Of the sites, 17 serve rural populations.

"When I heard about it I thought it would be good for us," said Cindy Natalie, the counselor at Hodge Road who coordinates the program at the school.

Natalie and Jones-Hall pick up the food in the trunk of Jones-Hall's car and take it back to the school for sorting.

Anthony Brooks, the shopping line attendant and special event driver at the Food Bank, said Food Bank supplies of food are low right now.



Juanita Jones-Hall, left, and Cindy Natalie look over some of the product available at the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

By Denise Sherman

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"The low season is in the around the spring and summer and we have to have food drives," Brooks said. The supply also has been affected by the economic needs.

To help meet those ends, The News & Observer and its community newspapers, including the Eastern Wake News, holds its annual Feed the Need program.

On Saturday, April 18, employees will be selling copies of the paper for \$1. Seventy-five cents of that goes to the Food Bank.

Eastern Wake County residents can donate food, money or buy a paper at Bojangles on Knightdale Boulevard in Knightdale.

Its first two years, donations totaled more than \$130,000 and 25,000 pounds of food. That's the equivalent of 573,000 meals.

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