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First Wok and ERDCC team up for Operation Backpack

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First Wok Chinese Restaurant in Park Hills partners with staff and offenders from the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre to raise \$2,500 for Central Elementary School's backpack program. Pictured, from left, are Jeff Lin, owner of First Wok Chinese Restaurants in Park Hills and Farmington, Kim Buckley, Central Elementary's School-based service worker and Beth Bess, Institutional Activities coordinator from ERDCC in Bonne Terre.

Amy Patterson, Daily Journal

First Wok Chinese Restaurant in Park Hills partnered with staff and offenders from the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre to raise \$2,500 for Central Elementary School's backpack program.

The effort was coordinated by Jeff Lin, owner of First Wok Chinese Restaurants in Park Hills and Farmington, and Beth Bess, Institutional Activities coordinator from ERDCC in Bonne Terre.

Bess said ERDCC's Restorative Justice Organization (RJO) purchased food from First Wok at a discount then sold it to the offenders housed at ERDCC at a profit.

“The RJO, the Restorative Justice Organization has fundraisers. We had a fundraiser with Jeff at First Wok and 100 percent of what we made profit-wise went to the backpack program.”

On First Wok's end, a Customer Appreciation Day on Sept. 26 offered a \$5 buffet with free drinks to draw in customers. Lin said they set a fundraising goal of \$1,500 for the backpack program.

“We made about \$1,500 on that day. ... We had about 230 people come in plus whatever customer donations and plus our employee donations we made about \$1,500. ... We wanted a special thank you for her (Bess) and her husband and also the five volunteers from Delassus First Baptist in Farmington.”

Combined with the money raised by ERDCC, a \$2,500 donation was made to Central Elementary School's backpack program.

Kim Buckley, Central Elementary's School-based service worker and coordinator for the backpack program accepted the donation on behalf of the school.

“I appreciate them donating the money for our backpack program," she said. "It's called 'Brenden's Friday Backpack.'”

Buckley said students are typically referred to the program by their teachers.

“The kids take food home for the weekend every Friday," she said. "We service every kid in the family, so if a child has 10 siblings, we're going to give 10 siblings a bag, too. We probably have about 60 kids in our backpack program right now.”

Volunteers collect donations and pack each bag every week.

“It has wonderful, non-perishable food items in it," she said. "Peanut butter, food they can put in the microwave, cereal, tuna or other high-protein foods, soup, ravioli and other kid-friendly foods. There's fresh fruit in there sometimes, too.”

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