

Backpack full of food helps kids in need



Bags of food are given to students in need in Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

The one-person Page & Sage program has evolved into a service club project.

Paula Peterson started the food giveaway program with a \$1,000 grant from American Century Championship, the celeb golf tourney in Stateline. It is now a project of Tahoe Douglas Rotary, to which Peterson belongs.

“I started with backpacks and a book for five kids at South Tahoe Middle School that first year and started to involve my fellow Rotarians,” Peterson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We then got another grant last summer, as well as donations from Rotarians and moved to 20 kids this school year. Then, with more donations from the Rotary Club and a private foundation, and food for some through the El Dorado County Food Bank we moved to 20 at STMS, five at STHS and 34 at Tahoe Valley.”

She gave a presentation about the program last week to Lake Tahoe Unified School District’s board of education.

Individual backpacks have single serving food items and a book. The idea is to feed the stomach and the brain.

"The food bag is made up of things that kids can serve themselves should it be necessary. They love the cup of noodles," Peterson said.

Food is stored at Temple Bat Yam, where the backpacks are put together.

"We are now looking for a committee of interested community members to take Page & Sage to the next level," Peterson said.

To reach 10 percent of the students in the district who receive a free or reduced lunch 230 backpacks would need to be made each week. It costs about \$7 per child, per week for a book and food.

Food and cash donations (checks may be made out to the Tahoe Douglas Rotary Foundation) are accepted by going online or calling 530.307.0909. Tahoe Valley Elementary School is having a food drive the first two weeks of May for the program.

Here is a list of suggested food items:

Single use oatmeal, Pop Tarts, single use cereal, yogurt cereal bars, fruit cereal bars, single fruit cups, kid-friendly canned veggies (as in no beets), canned beans, canned fruit, canned soup, canned meals (raviolis, Spaghettios, chili, stew), canned tuna, canned chicken, single use juices, shelf stable milk, mac and cheese, boxed grains, Cup of Noodles and Top Ramen. Individually wrapped snacks such as fruit snacks, crackers, granola bars, nuts, dried fruits, trail mix and raisins are also welcome. Also needed are new or gently used books for grades K-12.