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Reliant employees donate backpacks, supplies to Columbus Park school

By **Sandy Meindersma** CORRESPONDENT

WORCESTER — Teachers and students at Columbus Park Preparatory Academy will have new school supplies thanks to the employees at Reliant Medical Group's IT Department.

Assistant Principal Kathy Martinelli said that one of her friends, Tricia Gervais, who works at Reliant, got together with her coworkers and collected money and supplies to fill 25 backpacks for students at the school.

According to Ms. Gervais, Reliant's FUN Committee decided to reach out to the school, after first collecting funds for the company's own fund, which helps employees in need.

"We started out slowly collecting supplies in our break room and it has now grown to employees pledging money for a backpack," Ms. Gervais said. "Our IT department members sign up to pledge and make a monetary donation to cover the cost of the pack."

"This year, Tricia challenged the group to double it, and they did," Ms. Martinelli said. "They were able to fill 50 backpacks, and then they had so much money left over that they went and bought playground equipment, games for indoor recess, chalk, dry erase markers, tissues and hand sanitizer."

Ms. Gervais said the response to the challenge was overwhelming.

"We collected enough money to fill 50 backpacks, purchase additional teacher supplies and playground equipment this year," she said.

Ms. Martinelli said the Reliant team took great care with their purchases, and took the time to make each backpack student-ready.

"Not only did they buy all the supplies, but they filled the backpacks, opening the packages and putting all the pencils in the pencil cases," she said. "It was done so nicely."

Ms. Martinelli said that because of their generosity, each teacher was able to provide backpacks to several students in their classes who did not have new supplies on the first day.

But the students aren't the only lucky recipients.

With the extra supplies, Ms. Martinelli assembled a supply box for each classroom teacher, filled with the hand sanitizer, tissues, markers and extra supplies.

"Reliant gave us water bottles for each of the teachers, so I will put those in there," she said. "They are all going to get a little something — all the teachers still excited about new school supplies."

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