

Backpack giveaways prepare students for school

By **CHRISTINA COOKE**
Of The Times

TIGARD — Rising fourth-grader Karlene Neschke received a bright pink backpack full of school supplies last Thursday, but she kept it zipped at her mother's request.

"We leave it alone until the first day of school," said Julene Knake, explaining that the markers, pencils and paper inside would get used up if the pack was opened sooner.

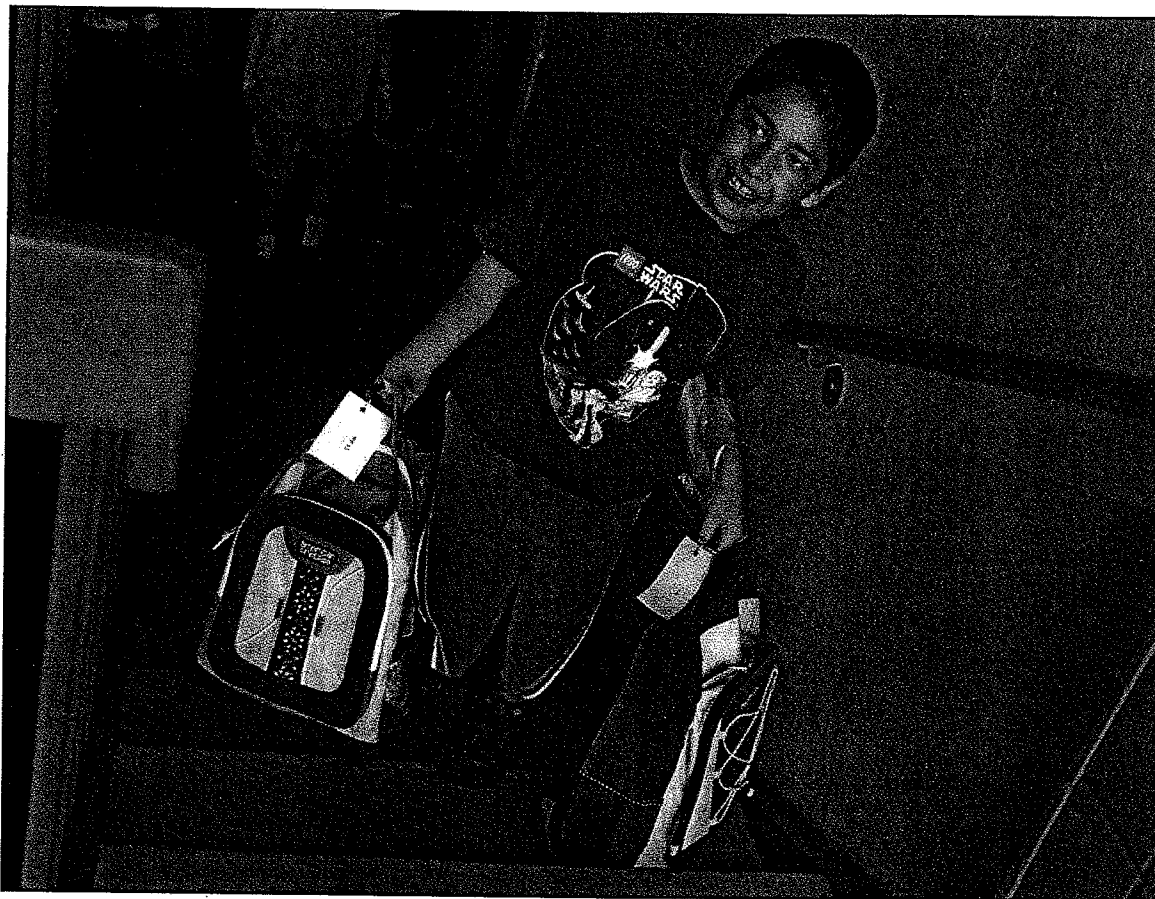
Seemingly fine with the idea, the pigtailed 9-year-old swung the pack onto her back and speculated about its contents: "It feels like there's 10 pounds of books in there!" she said.

In their annual tradition, the Good Neighbor Center and Rotary Club gave away backpacks of school supplies, plus \$15 gift certificates to Payless ShoeSource, to current and former patrons of the Tigard homeless shelter. This year, they gave away around 30 packs at an Aug. 27 pizza party, held at the Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church on Bull Mountain Road.

Community Partners for Affordable Housing offered a similar giveaway on Sept. 3 at Greenburg Oaks Apartments. In conjunction with Tigard United Methodist Church, Tigard Breakfast Rotary and Income Property Management, the community development agency gave away 150 backpacks to the students living in five of their properties.

CPAH Resident Services Director Shannon Wilson said the giveaway originally started when volunteers at the agency's after-school program noticed many children did not have the supplies they needed to complete their assignments.

"They'd come to do homework, but wouldn't have any pencils, or they'd be holding their folders and not have a backpack," she said. Since the



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READY FOR SCHOOL — Mark Gilbert-Mejia-Martinez, above, heads out after receiving two backpacks during Community Partners for Affordable Housing backpack giveaway on Sept. 3 at Greenburg Oaks Apartments. The giveaway was done in conjunction with Tigard United Methodist Church, Tigard Breakfast Rotary and Income Property Management. A similar event was held by the Good Neighbor Center and the Rotary Club on Aug. 27. At left, Karlene Neschke, 9, leaves the giveaway at the Good Neighbor Center with a new pink backpack.



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program started eight to 10 years ago, Wilson said, "we hear from parents what a great benefit it is and how helpful it is to them."

Knake said the gift of the backpack and supplies makes a huge difference in her fall budgeting.

"It takes all the stress and

worries away about my kids getting what they need for school, and it frees me up to get more clothes for them, or pay rent," she said. "I know my kids are going to be taken care of in school — so I can take care of them at home."

Jim Strickler, member of both the Good Neighbor Center board and Rotary Club, said having the backpacks and supplies enables less-fortunate students to start the year with the same advantages as their peers.

"We want these kids to go to school fully prepared with all the things they need, so

they're not different from the other kids," he said. "We want them to have the same chance at education as the kids whose parents can afford to buy supplies."

Josh, a 10-year-old whose mother preferred not to give their last name, listened to music through headphones at his table as he waited for the party and giveaway to begin.

The backpack he received last year, he said, was really cool because it had The Hulk on it.

"I got my favorite superhero on my backpack, and it was my favorite color, green," he said.

Josh said he's looking forward to starting fifth grade at C.F. Tigard Elementary this year and is especially excited about science class. He finds the topic of atoms especially fascinating, he said.

Kim Marshall, the shelter and housing manager for the Good Neighbor Center, said the shelter wants all children to have what they need to succeed in school.

"This is a way for them to have everything that's required of them," she said. "We don't want them to walk in (to school) and have to ask for more."