

Church expands Operation Backpack Blessing program

The First Presbyterian Church in Richmond has expanded its Operation Backpack Blessing program this school year.

The program, which provides bags of food to students living in high-poverty areas of the city on the last Friday of each month, now serves students at the Elizabeth Starr Academy for Young Entrepreneurs, C.R. Richardson, Vaile and Fairview elementary schools.

All four schools have free-and-reduced lunch rates of 85 percent or higher.

Program volunteers pack 1,200 bags consisting of two peanut butter and jelly Uncrustables sandwiches, 3 ounces of mini-pretzels, one banana, apple or orange, and one or two sealed packages of cookies.

Funding for the program is \$16,500 this year with grants obtained by the **Wayne County Foundation**, Reid Hospital Community Program, First Presbyterian Church and First Bank Richmond.

Volunteers from several organizations make the program possible nine months out of the year, including First Presbyterian Church, Boy Scouts, Circle U, Christian Charities Inc., the Friday Morning men's

Emmaus Share group, McFarling Foods, Richmond Community Schools and Richmond Baking.

Operation Backpack Blessing started in 2008 after a school administrator observed that students were performing poorly on tests in the last week of the month.

The program started at the Elizabeth Starr Academy, then called Starr Elementary, which is First Presbyterian's neighborhood school.

Hagerstown Elementary recognized for ISTEP gains

Hagerstown Elementary School was recognized by the American Student Achievement Institute as a "Top Gainer" school during the Indiana Conference on Learning on Jan. 24 in Indianapolis.

Schools designated as "Top Gainers" demonstrate exemplary improvement in

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