



Published September 20th, 2017

Orinda aims to help hurricane victims, teach empathy

By Sora O'Doherty

Hurricane Harvey left devastation in its wake, with many students in need of school uniforms and school supplies. Orinda hopes to help through a joint effort by the Orinda Union School District, the city of Orinda, Miramonte High School, and nonprofit Mindful Littles, called Orinda Cares. The group's first project, Helping Hands for Houston (HHH), is focused on supporting the student victims of Hurricane Harvey.

Partnering with HHH is Moraga-based backpack company, Sydney Paige, which is dedicated to promoting the importance of education and enriching the lives of children in need. Courtney Brockmeyer, CEO and founder of Sydney Paige, has been in contact with the department that serves homeless children in Houston. Normally, Brockmeyer explained, Houston has 6,000 to 7,000 homeless students; this year it is over 21,000.

People have been standing in lines for hours, she said, just to get a school uniform and a bottle of water. The providers in Houston have run out of everything.

According to Richard A. Carranza, superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, "Children will be dealing with the aftermath of a natural disaster, working to overcome fears of recurrence, loss, and other issues causing anxiety. ... Many of our students have lost everything, including basic school supplies.

Providing them with quality backpacks and the tools to do their work in school will help them feel loved, cared for, and prepared."

During the HHH project, service learning initiatives will be launched at all OUSD sites and at Miramonte High School. The backpacks cost \$31.75, which includes the cost of bag and shipping. Sydney Paige will bring backpacks and supplies to Orinda for the backpack "Assembly Party" from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 15 at the Orinda Community Center where students and community members will come together to fill each purchased backpack with supplies. Also included with each backpack will be student-created messages of hope and compassion from the Orinda students to those in Houston. The company will box the filled backpacks and ship them directly to the Houston department for distribution.

Orinda Cares hopes to raise enough funds to provide 1,000 backpacks filled with necessary school supplies, while educating and inspiring children to be compassionate global citizens, and engaging students in hands-on service learning projects to help Houston children in need.

For information, visit signeypaigeinc.com/orindacares.

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