



COMMUNITY  
*Food* WAREHOUSE

OF MERCER COUNTY



## **BACKPACK PROGRAM**

The Backpack Program is a program that feeds hungry school children on weekends. Eligible children deemed to be chronically hungry receive nutritious and child friendly food items for the weekends and prior to school vacations. The program began as a partnership between the Community Food Warehouse, the Hermitage School District, and Grace Chapel Community Church. The Backpack Program is a nationwide program of *Feeding America*, but operated and coordinated by individual food banks who so choose to have a program. Each food bank must adhere to Feeding America core standards, but are free to individualize and create their own program and partnerships.

Program participants are selected by means of eligibility criteria for determining chronic hunger. The school principal, nurse, teachers and support staff all have input into the child's eligibility. Most of these children are already participants in the government's free lunch program. The children's own backpacks are filled with child-friendly, shelf-stable/non-perishable, and easily consumable food, pre-packed by volunteers in plastic bags, which they take home each Friday during the school year. Utmost care is given in selecting nutritious food items.

Participants receive enough food for 4 meals which include 100% fruit juices, shelf stable milk, cereal, fruit cups, protein entrees, and healthy snacks such as fresh fruit, fruit and grain bars, raisins, sunflower seeds, peanut butter, and various other snacks items. Distribution is handled discreetly by school staff to maintain confidentiality.

The Backpack Program was a great success in the 2009/2010 school year with the Hermitage School District. For the 2010/2011 school year the program has expanded into a second school district, Sharon School District with the support of two additional churches, First Presbyterian Church and Covenant Presbyterian Church both in Sharon. We now serve 220-240 elementary/middle school children starting mid-September of 2010.

The Backpack Program boasts a volunteer base of approximately 200 dedicated volunteers. The churches work hard to garner support, both monetary and physical labor. The funds raised thus far have been dedicated to the purchase of food for the children. It has truly been a labor of love. We hope to be able to include other schools in desperate need of the program in the future. Hats off to our friends in the community who have accepted “The Backpack Challenge!”

In March 2011, the Backpack Program was the recipient of a \$5,000 grant from the MDRT (Million Dollar Round Table) Foundation to support its efforts.