



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield awards \$20,000 to support children's Backpack Program in Erie Schools through the Second Harvest Food Bank

ERIE, Pa., October 22 --- Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield has awarded a grant in the amount \$20,000 to support the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania's Backpack Program within the Erie City School District. The grant will provide nourishing food to 189 school students for 32 weekends during the school year, supporting proper nutrition for overall growth, physical and cognitive development as well as satisfactory performance in school.

Representatives from Highmark will volunteer their time this Friday, October 23 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Second Harvest to pack backpacks for children at Wayne Elementary School. Volunteers will then transport and distribute backpacks to Wayne Elementary students at 2 p.m. on Friday.

"With many children living in food insecure households, I am very grateful for the continued support from Highmark for Second Harvest's Backpack Program," said Karen Seggi, executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank. "This program is important because it removes the burden of hunger from the lives of children who should instead be focusing on education and homework, not how to fill their empty stomachs. There should be no doubt that children who are well-nourished do better than those who are not."

"At Highmark, we have a long-standing commitment to the health of the Erie community, and good health begins in childhood and builds from there," said Nina Ferraro, senior community affairs analyst for Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. "Second Harvest's backpack program is an excellent way to reach children needing nutritious food to support their learning and growth."

The Backpack Program provides needy children with nutritious, child-friendly food when other resources, such as school lunches and after-school meals or snacks, are not available. Backpacks are discreetly distributed to participating children at community centers or schools on Fridays and before holidays.

Second Harvest operates 27 of the more than 2,200 Backpack sites throughout the United States.

About the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania

The mission of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania is to provide food to those in need within 11 counties of northwest Pennsylvania while creating awareness and educating the community on the realities of hunger. Last year, Second Harvest distributed 12 million pounds of food to 298 member agencies, 144 distribution sites for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for low-income seniors. Second Harvest serves the following 11 counties in northwest Pennsylvania: Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Venango and Warren.

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