



Lenbrook

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[Home](#) > Lenbrook's Backpack Buddies Continue to Fight Hunger – Especially Now

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**Lenbrook's Backpack Buddies Continue to Fight Hunger – Especially Now**

[1]

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Did you know that at Dresden Elementary School, not too far from Lenbrook, 93% of more than its 1,000 students qualified as Title One students? Before the onset of the pandemic, they received free and reduced-price meals during the school week, but unfortunately, often had to go without healthy, nutritious meals during the weekends.

The Backpack Buddies program was designed and developed by Ronald Robbins of Beth Shalom and The Assistance League of Atlanta to provide weekend meals for children in schools where there were kids already getting breakfast and lunch at school during the week. Lenbrook was aware of the program because two residents, Pat Bloom and Michael Halpern, knew of the program because of Pat Bloom's friendship with Ronald Robbins at Beth Shalom and Michael Halpern's research. Primarily because of their interest, a Backpack Buddies program was started at Lenbrook in early January 2020.

As Richard Conway, Lenbrook's then President of the Residents Association notes in this video (<https://vimeo.com/417583732> [2]), "To start our own Backpack Buddies program, we needed four things: (1) financing to buy the food, (2) a place to store and pack the food, (3) a champion, and (4) volunteers. Richard approached us to take leadership in this effort and we agreed. "Hunger does not take a weekend off" is the Backpack Buddies slogan, and we are proud to be a part of the solution to alleviate hunger. It is clearly part of the Lenbrook spirit to give back when you can.

Contributions and volunteers came quickly and our program began. We partnered with Ashford Dunwoody YMCA, the Atlanta Community Food Bank, and the North Atlanta Rotary Club to begin purchasing and packing 48 backpacks each Thursday and then delivering them to Dresden Elementary in late January. Each backpack for the weekend included 4 proteins, 2 vegetables, 2 fruits, 2 breakfast items, 2 juices, 2 milks, and 2 snacks.

### ***And then...***

In mid-March with the onset of COVID-19, Dresden Elementary closed and Lenbrook was closed our community to visits on or off-campus and our operations paused. Fortunately, the Dresden Elementary School Education Foundation kept Backpack Buddies running and has been feeding 227 families per week – also made possible by a monthly \$2,000 donation by Lenbrook residents. Even though we could no longer physically pack backpacks while sequestered on campus, we all wanted to continue to support these families. We look forward to starting up our full Backpack Buddies program again in the Fall, one week after school starts, donating 48 backpacks per week.

We are proud and honored to work with our Lenbrook Backpack Buddies and Heather Flaherty, one of our Chaplains, to help fight hunger – especially now.

For more about the Backpack Buddies program, see this article in Atlanta Senior Life:  
<https://atlantaseniorlife.com/backpack-buddies-hunger-doesnt-take-the-weekend-off/> <sup>[3]</sup>

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### **Links**

[1] <https://lenbrook-atlanta.org/blog/2020/07/lenbrook%E2%80%99s-backpack-buddies-continue-fight-hunger-%E2%80%93-especially-now>

[2] <https://vimeo.com/417583732>

[3] <https://atlantaseniorlife.com/backpack-buddies-hunger-doesnt-take-the-weekend-off/>