

Back to school



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Reduced lunches now free

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — It's time to fill out those forms for free and reduced lunch, even if you qualified last year.

"You do have to do it every year," said Lisa Miller, of Central School District food services.

In fact, even if you aren't sure if you qualify, Miller said you should fill one out.

"You should always turn one in because there's a possibility that you could get reduced versus the free."

This year, a grant will cover the costs of all reduced lunches in Oregon, making those lunches free, too.

Central schools also offer free breakfast for all students.

Falls City schools offer free breakfast and lunch for all students, but having a free and reduced lunch form filled out can help with other things.

For example, many youth sports programs — including those at the high school level — have lower fees for student who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

"The high school has testing fees that are waived or reduced if a student's household qualifies for free or reduced lunch," Miller said.

Miller said each year she gets a list from the state of families who have been authorized for free and reduced lunch, but not all the siblings are always listed.

She has mailed out 500 letters to families in Central School District who are directly certified, but said people need to check and make sure all their children are listed.

"If I don't get an application from the family, I have no way of knowing that Jonny is Teresa's brother until much later in the year," Miller said. Sometimes this can cause lunch bills to be sent unnecessarily to families.

Forms for free or reduced lunch may be found online or at any school in the county: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/nsfp/national-school-lunch-program-nsfp>.

Joanna Sanabia, a volunteer with The Salvation Army, puts supplies in backpacks for kindergarteners at Dallas Family Night Out at host Dallas United Methodist Church. About 500 backpacks were awaiting students to claim them at the event.

Local organizations, churches try to make 'back to school' a little easier for students

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Sorry kids — it's time.

Your days of carefree summer fun are nearly over as Labor Day approaches.

With the first day of school just around the corner, organizations in Dallas and Falls City were busy helping the eager — or not-so-eager — students get ready to go back to class this fall.

Dallas Family Night Out had more than 500 backpacks filled with school supplies to hand out, as well as free clothing, haircuts and other resources available last Wednesday.

The event, which began in 2012, paired up with the Apple Tree supplies collection and The Salvation Army's "Tools for Schools" program in an effort to reach even more families this year.

A rush just after the event opened indicated that may have been the case.

Almost 50 service providers and other agencies attended, another sign of growth.

"We just about fell over when we did the count on that," said coordinator Sheri Beehner.

She said the giveaway fills a need she's familiar with.

"I grew up poor and my mom couldn't afford a backpack," she said. "That's why I want to do this. Families can come here and not be pres-

sured to spend any money at all."

While the event was free, that doesn't mean Beehner and crew didn't know how to make back to school fun. Live music, a bounce house, an up-close experience with Dallas Fire Department engines and dinner were offered.

On Thursday, students in Falls City were the guests of honor at a similar event, a partnership between The Salvation Army and Monmouth Christian Church.

The Tools for School Program had 185 backpacks ready to give away, more than enough for every child enrolled in the Falls City School District. Halfway through, volunteers were afraid they were running out of supplies, but they were able to pull through.

"We were able to shuffle things around and get everybody a backpack," said Lacey Carlson, the Salvation Army's resource development coordinator.

Dinner, clothing and haircuts were available there too.

Incoming seventh-grader Ashton Harding decided to get his back-to-school haircut in Falls City Thursday. He was very specific about what he wanted.

"I want an inch off the back and the sides," he said.

"I was asked not to touch the top," chimed in Duana Robertson, of Hot Rod Hair in Dallas who volunteered



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Volunteers sort through backpacks with supplies at "Tools for Schools" in Falls City.

for the event.

Ashton, who goes to LaCreole Middle School, had already picked up his backpack by the time he stopped by Robertson's station and seemed excited to begin school again. He's ready to see his friends and take part in drama class.

Besides getting his supplies and haircut Thursday, Ashton said he is only changing one thing from his summer routine to get ready for school.

"Going to bed a little bit earlier," he said.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Duana Robertson cuts Ashton Harding's hair Thursday.

Minor injuries and two structures lost in house fire

Resident, firefighter were treated on scene by Dallas EMS; crews saved residence from major damage

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — A garage and shed were lost and two people suffered minor injuries in a house fire in Dallas Saturday morning.

At about 11:06 a.m. Saturday, firefighters were called to a home in the 400 block of Southeast Uglov Avenue on a report of a garage on fire.

According to Dallas Fire & EMS, the homeowner had been working in the detached garage when the fire broke out.

"The resident was grinding some metal," Dallas Fire spokeswoman April Welsh said. "That's what we initially think started the fire."

Firefighters arrived at about 11:17 a.m. and had the fire under control by 11:50. The fire had spread to a nearby shed and utility room on the main house before crews were able to contain it.

"The garage was a complete loss and the shed was a complete loss," Welsh said. "We were able to keep the fire from going inside the residence."

One of the residents and a firefighter who responded suffered minor inhalation injuries during the fire.

"Both the resident and the firefighter were treated on scene," Welsh said. "Neither were transported."

A Dallas fire chaplain helped the residents — two adults — connect with the American Red Cross for assistance.

Welsh said this is yet another example why people should be careful when working



APRIL WELSH/ for the Itemizer-Observer

Saturday's house fire started in a detached garage at a home on the 400 block of Uglov Avenue in Dallas. The garage and nearby shed were destroyed by the flames.

in dry and hot conditions.

"Be very conscientious about your outdoor activities," Welsh said. "(This is) another example of how something so minor can create an issue."

Fifteen firefighters and 20 total personnel

responded to the scene.

Dallas Fire was assisted on the scene by Southwest Polk, Polk Fire No. 1, Dallas EMS, and NW Natural. Polk County Sheriff's Office and Dallas Police closed the road while crews put out the fire.



APRIL WELSH/for the Itemizer-Observer

The entry way and utility room were also damaged in Saturday's fire, but the fire didn't reach the main part of the house.