

## NEWS

# Rats destroy \$10k worth of food intended for South Kitsap students in need



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PORT ORCHARD — A rat infestation recently destroyed a large amount of food — instant oatmeal packs, ramen, macaroni and cheese, granola bars, pudding cups, and trail mix with a total value near \$10,000 — that was headed to help about 375 South Kitsap students.

The incident happened last month in the Backpacks for Kids food program's storage space, a room in the basement of Sidney Commons in Port Orchard. Rats were nesting in the oatmeal boxes and "the walls were coated like they (rats) just moved in and had a rip-roaring party in there," founder of the Backpack for Kids program, Tish VanRavenhorst recalled.

Besides food, almost all of the shelves in the room have to be replaced, as well as the tables where the volunteers pack the food, VanRavenhorst told Kitsap Sun.

The cleanup efforts started on November 25. Fortunately, with the help of several community groups, including South Kitsap Rotary and South Kitsap High School, the deliveries to support kids who rely on the food program didn't stop. The high school managed the packs and deliveries while Backpacks for Kids worked on recovering their operations from the incident.

VanRavenhorst expressed her gratitude for those who helped.

"The South Kitsap community is amazing. The support has been overwhelming. It has been, just hundreds of people have pulled together to raise money and to clean now and to get the word out, and to even make packs happen. It has been just absolutely incredible," VanRavenhorst said.

Backpacks for Kids was established in 2007. It's an organization out of First

Christian Church that works with the South Kitsap School District. The food program provides food for children whose families are financially struggling so they'd have meals over the weekend. Every week, a team of volunteers at First Christian Church fill packs — each with two instant oatmeal packs, two ramen noodles, two boxes of macaroni and cheese, two canned tuna, a pudding cup, a granola bar, and a trail mix. The packs are delivered to the schools and distributed by school staff.

## **Ways you can help**

The program will need \$10,000 to repurchase the food, shelves and tables lost in the rat infestation, VanRavenhorst said.

The South Kitsap Rotary is accepting donations on behalf of Backpacks for Kids at [https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=GMS5S92KYHNL8](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=GMS5S92KYHNL8). The Rotary is matching up to \$5,000 in donations.

There are also three places in Port Orchard where donations may be dropped off. On Sundays at Sidney Glen Elementary, 4885 SW Hovde Road, and Monday through Friday at Trina Knoche Farmer's Insurance, 104 Tremont Street #200, or Kitsap RACC, 1730 SE Mile Hill Dr Suite 100.