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Published: Wednesday, February 2, 2011

Shoe fund in need of money

By Katie Murdoch
Enterprise editor

Nearly 500 students in the Everett School District have received a free pair of shoes through the PTA Shoe Fund this school year and members are asking the community for financial help to continue serving students until June.

For the past 35 years, PTA groups at each of the district's 26 schools have earmarked a stipend toward the Shoe Fund. But keeping up with the rising number of students in need has proved challenging as awareness of the program grows and more families tighten their belts.

"Schools keep giving money but the need keeps growing," Shoe Fund chairwoman Angela Steck said.

Since September, the Shoe Fund committee has handed out 494 Payless Shoes gift cards to Everett School District students, good for one pair of shoes. That's a 33 percent increase from last year, when the committee distributed 393 cards from September to December, Steck said. When the shoe program started in 1976, 49 cards were handed out to students in need.

Teachers and counselors identify students who could benefit from the program. The committee only takes note of the student's grade level, then gives the referring teacher or counselor a Payless Shoes gift card for the student that can be redeemed at the retail chain's Everett location. Elementary school students receive \$15 and middle- and high-schoolers are given \$20.

PTA members anticipate the need to continue rising throughout the second half of the school year.

"There's a need across the board," Steck said.

To keep up, PTA members are asking the community for help through donations. Some of the PTA groups also are considering penny fund drives to bring in extra money for the Shoe Fund.

Last year, students at Jefferson Elementary School in Everett raised about \$1,800 through a penny drive that they gave to the Shoe Fund, Steck said. "It's one of the most economically challenged areas in the district and they gave the most," she said.

Steck said this is the first time the PTA groups have asked outside organizations for help — the demand has never been this high. Once in 2001, the groups accepted an unsolicited donation from a physician who raised \$2,000 in two weeks with half the proceeds donated to the Shoe Fund. The other half went to Operation School Bell, which provides students with school clothes.

One misconception of the Shoe Fund program is that certain areas of the Everett School District, namely the Mill Creek area, don't have students who would benefit from the program. That's not true, Steck said.

"(Those schools) may need it less, but they still need it," she said. "By the time June hits, every school will use the Shoe Fund."

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More info

For more information, contact Shoe Fund Chairwoman Angela Steck at angelasteck@live.com.

Donations can be mailed to: Angela Steck, P.O. Box 13161, Mill Creek, WA 98082

Checks should be made payable to Everett Council PTSA 7.3 (Shoe Fund)

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Steck said some teachers have families in mind they know are struggling financially. For other teachers and counselors, they identify students by observing who has been wearing the same shoes every day for months or whose shoes are falling apart or have holes.

Kim Nunnally-Hirata, a social worker and counselor at Silver Firs Elementary School, said some of the students feel proud after arriving at school in a new pair of shoes.

She recalled a student who approached her to show off her new shoes.

“She bounced up to me in her new sneakers,” Nunnally-Hirata said. “Prior to that she didn’t have P.E.-appropriate shoes. Kids feel like they fit in.”

When she started at Silver Firs in 1990, Nunnally-Hirata referred three to five students per year to the program. This year, she has already given 12 students gift cards and expects to help more before the school year ends.

Nunnally-Hirata said sometimes parents approach her to ask for assistance after reading about the Shoe Fund program in brochures she distributed. She also calls parents to alert them their child is coming home with a gift card.

“The families are grateful,” she said.

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