



The army of school staff, bus drivers, Quest food staff, and volunteers packed 11 buses for food distribution.

In Good Hands

BARRINGTON 220 STUDENTS IN NEED ARE NOT FORGOTTEN DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

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ABOUT 20% OF THE STUDENTS in Barrington 220 qualify for either free or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches. That is about 1,600 students who depend on the district Monday through Friday for healthy meals that will get them through the day.

The idea of schools feeding low income students is not new. President Harry Truman signed the National School Lunch Act in 1946. It established the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which is a federally assisted meal program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day.

But what happens when a global pandemic forces schools to physically shut down in the middle of the school year? After Governor Pritzker ordered

all Illinois schools to close this spring, the state did not require school districts to continue providing meals to students in need. However, Barrington 220 staff quickly mobilized, working with the district's food vendors and Barrington Transportation Company, as well as organizations like Barrington Children's Charities and Barrington Giving Day, in order to ensure students would continue receiving their meals.

We spoke with LeeAnn Taylor, Director of Fiscal Services and Asset Management, and Lauren Delahoy, Director of Food Services for Barrington High School, about the extraordinary effort they have helped lead and have witnessed on behalf of students in need.



QB: *LeeAnn, please tell us about your role at the district.*

LeeAnn: My title is Director of Fiscal Services and Asset Management. I am involved in food service and also with the budget, paying bills, and I oversee payroll and accounts payable. I also work closely with our facilities teams and our Human Resource Department. Over the last couple of years, food service has really been a priority in the district. We want to get kids quality meals by improving our level of service.

QB: *When did you realize you needed to start a food distribution plan?*

LeeAnn: Dr. Craig Winkelman, who is our Assistant Superintendent for Operations and K-12 schools approached me and said, “Start thinking about ways we could get kids meals if we were not in school.” A few days later, we could see [that school closing] was going to happen and it became pretty much a full-time job for me. In addition to the meals through the National School Lunch Program, we were going to get breakfast and lunch to kids. We knew many of the students get a snack and a dinner. They stay at a wrap-around program at Sunny Hill School and many meals were provided, as well as the Blessings in a Backpack program that our Barrington Children’s Charities graciously gives every Friday to parents and families who want to participate. The students pick up these Blessings bags every Friday. We knew there are many families that are food reliant on the school district. It became obvious that when the governor stressed that giving food to students was important—with our culture and all the giving people and organizations we have in this community—that we could do this.

QB: *Lauren, please tell us about your role at the district.*

Lauren: I am the Director of Food Services for Barrington High School. I work for a contracted company called Quest Food Management. A typical day for me is overseeing our kitchen staff and food production, menu writing, payroll, our accounting/billing alongside an assortment of additional tasks.



Food is received, sorted, and packed.



LeeAnn Taylor (on left) and Lauren Delahoy lead the charge, coordinating logistics and hands-on help to feed Barrington 220 students in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Barrington 220 Exec. Chef Eric Corradetti.

QB: *Lauren, did you ever anticipate that something like this pandemic would happen?*

Lauren: If you would have approached any of us a few months ago, I believe every one of us would have never even thought this would become our new normal. But with the large support from District 220 leadership, Quest, Barrington Transportation, Barrington's Children's Charities, and Barrington Giving Day everyone has really stepped up to support our community and I couldn't be more proud of everyone involved.

QB: *LeeAnn, did you ever envision this kind of situation?*

LeeAnn: Absolutely not. Three months ago I could never even have thought of this. Two months ago it was in the back of people's heads. It's crazy how fast it has unfolded and I am so proud to work in a school district that was ready for this. In terms of the digital learning pieces, the devices we have in kids hands, and how we adapted and got the students and families the nourishment they needed by partnerships with Barrington Giving Day and Barrington Children's Charities has been fantastic.

QB: *LeeAnn, what service personnel are involved?*

LeeAnn: Our bus drivers and Quest roles change every week. The program has evolved and we are keeping our bus drivers employed by giving them something to do. Our Quest people are doing all of the assembly of the food and the packages and taking a leadership role. I have been there on the first day or two for the logistics and the distribution and other than that, some of the Barrington Transportation bus drivers are driving buses and some of them are delivering food to doorsteps. The Quest people are also delivering food, assembling packages of food. Starting last Tuesday, Barrington Giving Day is able to coordinate with some local restaurants and some local donors and they are delivering a hot meal every Tuesday that can be warmed up for families. About 400 families are signed up so they go to about

400 households every Tuesday and Thursday and on Tuesdays they get a hot meal. Also, during another week Barrington Giving Day took a turn and passed out toiletries, toilet paper, paper towels, and things like that. Not only has Barrington Children's Charities been a huge supporter but Barrington Giving Day, as well.

QB: *There are 900 families on the free and reduced lunch program across all the 60010 area villages. Was this a daunting concept to distribute food to them all?*

LeeAnn: It was daunting and I knew I needed help from a lot of people. I knew that at the forefront people were asking if they could drop off food somewhere. We wanted to eliminate the congregating and keep people at home, so we went to this delivery model and it has been really successful. If people want to donate they can donate to Barrington Giving Day or to Barrington Children's Charities on their website or they can coordinate people who want to donate specific items. Rather than the district having to take on all those donations, these outside organizations are taking that on and managing that. We are simply working with our other partner, Sodexo, who manages all of our food for the National School Lunch Program right now.

QB: *Tell us about the food items that Barrington Children's Charities supplied.*

Lauren: I have been working closely with Barrington Children's Charities to assure we continue to send out the normal Blessing in a Backpack items. This includes items like mac and cheese, soup, apples, cereal, oatmeal, etc. In addition to the typical Blessing items we have begun to add items like tortillas, bread, cucumbers, bananas, lemons, limes, oranges, potatoes, carrots, celery, onions, and pasta. Because our families are at home a lot more often than before, it was huge to be able to provide additional fresh fruit and veggies to supplement nutrition.



LeeAnn Taylor and Eric Corradetti with a volunteer.




Quest food staff sort and pack food for the day's deliveries.

LeeAnn: I want to add in that Barrington Giving Day does two big events with us every year. One in the fall (back to school event) and one at the holidays. Now they are partnering with us since this took place a month ago. Their relationships and their wanting to consistently help the district has been amazing.

QB: *How has this effort to keep children fed affected you?*

LeeAnn: I could not be more proud. I am speechless at how we continue to get this food to people and the gratitude and the logistics; the things everybody is thinking of. I am so grateful to work in a community that has all of these resources and it has humbled me and made me realize that I put a plan in place and people just took it and ran. It's made me realize that people are learning things from these experiences and people are growing from these experiences. We are making a huge difference in these kids' lives by just making sure they get some meals.

Lauren: My job and main focus each and every day is to provide our communities with high-quality food, exceptional responsiveness, and intensely personal services. Quest has been an amazing company to allow their employees to do just that. When District 220 approached us to be part of the COVID-19 efforts in feeding the community, I knew we would be able to do just that. Personally, this has been the most humbling experience I have gone through. Seeing the faces of our children when they saw the school buses drive through their neighborhoods and seeing a weight lifted off countless parents' backs as we dropped off the food just solidified the reason each and every one of us partnered up to feed the community. I am beyond proud of every single person who has had a part of these efforts to feed our community. 

BLESSINGS IN A BACKPACK



Barrington Children's Charities founders Tom and Darby Hills with a Barrington 220 student packing food bags for students in need.

Barrington Children's Charities has been serving the children of Barrington 220 for 10 years since its founding. The charity's Blessings in a Backpack program provides food through a 36-week program. Initially, 750 children had made up the list of recipients, but since the pandemic that number has grown to 1,500. Costs for increased food distribution, personal protection gear for employees and volunteers, and bags has climbed dramatically.

"When the charity decided to take on the challenge of feeding local children during the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew we couldn't do it alone," Darby Hills said. "We were so fortunate to partner with Barrington 220 School District, Quest Food Management Services, and Barrington Transportation. Each of the companies filled a significant role in this endeavor. We were also pleased to help keep people employed and working while they were helping feed these children and families. I recently received this message [below] directly from a mother in the district who shared her gratitude."

"We don't know each other on a personal level, but my kids are in the Barrington School District and I have waited on you a few times at [my place of work] in Barrington. I wanted to reach out to you and thank you for all the work you do with Barrington Children's Charities. It has helped my family tremendously over the years and most recently with what is going on now. On top of the pandemic, I was let go from [my job] a week before Christmas and am a single mother, so what you do for those of us in need will never be taken for granted. Thank you."