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## **Donation of 3, 000 lunches benefits Fifth Ward area**

By JOSHUNDA SANDERS  
Staff

The bright orange Allied Van Lines moving truck arrived at the city of Houston Fifth Ward Multi-Service Center carrying boxes filled with thousands of bag lunches for 11 young boys of the *Fifth Ward Enrichment Program* to haul into the J.W. Peavy Senior Citizen Center Thursday afternoon.

More than 1,300 Houston-Area Prudential employees and Daryl Flood/Allied Van Lines organized the Third Annual "Lunch: It's In the Bag," a food drive to fill **3, 000** lunch bags for children in Houston's Fifth Ward.

Volunteers collected the non-perishable lunches and a moving company transported those units to the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program Inc. The enrichment program, founded in 1984, empowers inner-city, black and Hispanic teen-age boys to become responsible men and productive members of their communities through vocational training, a Young Father's program and various educational support programs.

Ernest McMillan, director of the enrichment program, said, "We let our boys get an opportunity to perform community service. They've been given to, so this gives them a chance to give back."

Eleven young boys wearing crisp white T-shirts that read "Choosing Positive Constructive Pathways" moved hundreds of boxes with tidy white lunch bags snuggled inside to the J.W. Peavy Senior Citizen Center, only a few feet from the Multi-Service Center. They did so without complaint in the hot sun, stopping only after the boxes of bagged lunches filled a room and the van was empty.

Although subsidized lunch programs in the area offer free lunches during the school year and for a few weeks during the summer, only 85 percent to 95 percent reduced lunches are available in some areas after the free lunch program is over. Some children do not have transportation to places where reduced lunches are available. The "Lunch: It's In The Bag!" program alleviates that problem by delivering lunches to children who need them.

While the enrichment program is willing to give back to its community, budget cuts will prevent some Fifth Ward boys from joining the program.

"This year we have 70 kids in our program; usually we have 130. This is the first year we had to cut back because of budget cuts," said Charles Savage, director of the program's teen enterprise center.

The nearly 50 percent decline was created by cutbacks in funding from government agencies, corporations and other sources. As the boys lined up at the water fountain to get a drink of water, though, Darcy Todia, a Prudential spokeswoman and volunteer, was looking for Ernest McMillan.

"Today we're going to present the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program with a check for \$10,000. In previous years, we've given them \$5,000," Todia said. "But we wanted to give them a bigger grant so it would have a bigger impact." The grant was given by the Prudential Foundation, which is based in Newark, N.J.

Each year the lunch deliveries not only benefit the school-age children, but it also trickles out to the rest of the community.

"We share about one-third of the lunches we receive with other residents in the community, including the elderly, or anyone in the community who calls us," Savage said. His Teen Enterprise Center teaches the young men life management skills and other valuable lessons. "We give lunches to HeadStart programs, summer Bible schools and other large groups in the neighborhood."

Lunches consist of boxes of juice, cans of potted meat, like Vienna Sausages, crackers, cheese, bags of chips. The lunches are non-perishable and nutritious.

If you would like to donate food or any other contribution you can contact: Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, Inc. 4014 Market Street, Suite 105 Houston, Texas 77020. For information, call 713-229-8353 or e-mail [fwepinc@hern.org](mailto:fwepinc@hern.org).

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