



Chris Bernacchi

Attorney Candice Jones helps children pick out coats at McAuliffe Elementary School. Under an effort started by Mark S. Bernstein, lawyers and staff from the firm of Barack, Ferrazzano, Kirschbaum & Nagelberg LLP have been conducting an annual coat drive for students at the West Side school. The firm also provides school supplies and backpacks.

Law firm delivers warmth to West Side students

By Pat Milhizer
Law Bulletin staff writer

In a city where you don't need an arctic blast off Lake Michigan to remind you that a winter coat is an obvious necessity, it's easy to forget that warm jackets can be more like a luxury for some families.

"It is something that I think a lot of us take for granted and our kids take for granted. But it's a necessity that, we've seen, a lot of these kids don't have," said Mark S. Bernstein of Barack, Ferrazzano, Kirschbaum & Nagelberg LLP.

About 400 public school students got brand new winter

coats on Tuesday, thanks to an office fundraising effort by attorneys and staff at Barack, Ferrazzano. In addition, all of the roughly 800 students at McAuliffe Elementary School received new winter hats, gloves and scarves.

McAuliffe, located near Humboldt Park on the city's West Side, sits in a zip code where the median household income is just above \$35,000, according to U.S. Census data. Most of the families who send kids to the school couldn't afford the quality of jackets that were distributed in the buzzing auditorium, said David Pino, school principal.

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"You go around here now, and you see the kids, and their coats are as good as any affluent suburban school," Pino said.

This is the third year that Barack, Ferrazzano has donated coats and other items to the school, located in the Hermosa neighborhood.

"Three years in a row. It's incredible. I didn't expect to see them again," Pino said.

Along with the coats in winter, the law firm donates school supplies and new backpacks on the first day of classes each year.

The donations not only get pens and notebooks to the students, they also help get the school year off to an unusually strong start.

"You read about it every year, there's horrible attendance on the first day of school" throughout the school district, Bernstein said.

Packing the classrooms on the first day was one of the objectives that came out of discussions between the lawyers and the school principal as the relationship was being developed. Warm coats were identified as a useful resource in the effort to combat a gradual drop-off in atten-

dance that occurred each year as winter set in.

The effort has been rewarding for the firm, Bernstein said, because it's something the entire staff can get to work on, regardless of position.

"There will be kids outside in the middle of winter in a T-shirt or a sweatshirt," Bernstein said. "I think we understand we're making a real difference."

And the students will tell you that.

"It's a relief to our family because there's so many expenses we have to pay," said Amanda Cortes, who's in the 6th grade. "And just to know you could get a coat for free...."

Added Isaac Sierra, another 6th-grader:

"It's great because not a lot of people could get coats like this. We're one of the lucky schools."

In addition to Bernstein, law firm employees who helped with Tuesday's effort were attorneys Roger H. Stetson, Christine K. Nichols, Heather J. Macklin, Sharon Calhoun, Candice Jones, Brandon Prosansky, Matthew W. Kim-Miller and Matthew A. Swanson; staff members Salina Hernandez, Carlos Duran, John Jelderks and Bill Leone; and paralegal Angela Saliani.