

Southington police carrying emergency food kits for residents in need



Officials with several community organizations recently presented police with emergency food kits to give to needy residents. Officer Mark DiBattista, pictured at center, helped initiate the idea. | Courtesy of Southington police



May 11, 2017 10:20PM
By Jesse Buchanan Record-Journal staff



SOUTHINGTON — Police began carrying emergency kits with food, water and other supplies this month to hand out to needy residents they may encounter.



Several groups in town, such as Bread for Life, Southington Town-wide Effort to Promote Success and the Main Street Community Foundation helped compile the boxes and delivered them to the police department earlier this month. Thus far officers have handed out four kits.



Mark DiBattista, a patrol officer, helped initiate the idea when he was talking with Bread for Life board member Bill McDougall. DiBattista said it's routine for police officers to encounter people who need housing, food and other necessities. Sometimes it's homeless people but other times it's newly widowed elderly residents who are having trouble.



"You can tell when you walk in a home and something's not right. There's no food in the fridge," DiBattista said. "We give them one of these kits to get them going."



The kits have bottled water, nutrition bars and shakes, sanitary wipes, an emergency blanket and contacts for service organizations in town.



Donna Ayer, Bread for Life executive director, said four boxes have been given out since the start of the month. Two new people have begun coming to the organization's Vermont Avenue location for free food and she believes they're a result of those aid boxes.

Ayer said the boxes help officers do what they've already been doing on their own.

"The police encounter people with food insecurity issues every day," she said. "What people don't realize is that police are incredibly generous in buying people hotel rooms, food."

DiBattista said that's common for officers but isn't something they talk about often.

"We're on the front lines. We see this every day, you try to do what you can," he said.

Supplies for the boxes were funded by the Main Street Community Foundation. STEPS staff put the boxes together.

Ayer said she hopes to keep the department supplied with boxes. She'll also include more items as needs arise, such as can openers.

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