



## Backpack in another park

For the Kid's annual school supply drive sets up shop in Grant Park

By **ROB BECK**  
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For the Kid in All of Us' Backpack in the Park may be in a different location this year, but the organization's new president says the event will pack the same fun.

The annual school supply drive held in Piedmont Park for the past two years will take place in Grant Park next week.

"As Backpack in the Park celebrates its third anniversary, the biggest change is location, and we're very excited about being in Grant Park," says Frank Bragg, who is also director of communications for Metrotainment Cafés. "The pavilions will be the perfect shelter and the park is absolutely beautiful. We'll be featuring a climbing wall, a carnival-style 'strong man' game, and it wouldn't be Backpack in the Park without the blow-up jumpy thing."

The move was rooted in necessity, as Piedmont Park continues to maintain restrictions on large events on park grounds. The same restrictions forced Atlanta Pride out of its familiar surroundings, but Bragg and his fellow board members are confident that this year will see Backpack in the Park continue to grow.

"Part of our mission is 'bridging communities,' so it was actually a perfect fit to travel to a neighborhood a bit south of Midtown," Bragg says. "We are confident that we will reach a new audience, while keeping our core constituency."

The party asks attendees to bring a new backpack filled with school supplies or a \$30 gift card as the price of admission. Over the past two years, the event has brought in and distributed more than 1,200 backpacks and gift cards to its beneficiaries, which include Atlanta Public Schools, City Schools of Decatur, Tobie Grant Manor, and CHRIS Kids. This year, organizers hope to add another 1,000 to that tally.

"We hope that with two years under our collective belts, that this year's event will be bigger and better," says Bragg. "One of our themes this year is that the children in need in our community need help 'now more than ever.' We look forward to our community coming together and showing its generosity."

CHRIS Kids CEO Kathy Colbenson concurs with the message behind the "now more than ever" theme.

"Everybody's suffering in this economy, and so this allows the kids to start school with all the supplies that they need to help them be successful, so they don't have to feel inadequate or less than," she says.

The bags and supplies donated to CHRIS Kids go to children in the organization's residential programs as well as its Keeping Families Together community program.

**THIS YEAR MARKS** more changes for the Kid than just a new location for Backpack in the Park. The organization that also hosts the annual Toy Party saw a change in leadership in February, as Bragg took over presidential duties from founder Alex Wan.

"This is a very transitional year for us," Bragg says. "Many newly-formed organizations find the five-year mark to be significant in development, planning, strategy, etc. The first five years were expertly run by the founding board with a very foundation-building focus, and what an incredible foundation they built! Now, we are fine-tuning our operation, putting more systems in place, and looking to the future for the type of growth we want to tackle."

Bragg has been involved with For the Kid since the first Toy Party in 2003, which he catered with Metrotainment. Metrotainment continued to cater For the Kid events, and Bragg continued to help in a volunteer capacity for two years before joining the board.

"This organization serves so many different organizations and significant purposes," he says. "It is truly an honor [to serve as president]. I have a tremendous opportunity to help craft the future of this organization, and to work with incredible people who serve with me on the board."



Volunteers pose with some of the backpacks donated last year. (Photo by Sher Pruitt)