



- Dominique Taylor/Vail Daily

## First-graders get back-to-school boost

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EAGLE COUNTY — Edwards Elementary first-grader Karsen Williams' eyes lit up as he grabbed his new backpack and quickly rifled through the pockets and compartments.

"This is awesome!" he said.

Karsen was one of almost 200 students between the Edwards and Avon elementary schools who received a new backpack and school supplies for the year from the Cordillera Motorcycle Association, a biking club and charitable foundation.



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In Shelly McLeod's first-grade class, students lugged large boxes of brand-new school supplies to their desks and tore through the cellophane wrapping to colorful notebooks, crayons and markers.

### Back-to-school necessities

Members of the motorcycle club roared up to the schools on their bikes,

and Jeeps bearing the goods rolled up right behind them. They delivered about \$7,000 in school supplies and \$4,400 worth of backpacks to the students.

“We want these kids to get the best start on the school year we can give them,” said Greg Allen, a founding member of the association.

He said he hopes the supplies reach some of the neediest children in the community.

The gifts will make a difference for the students, said Edwards Elementary Principal Heidi Hanssen.

“There’s definitely a high cost for getting supplies. This really helps the families,” she said.

Edwards Elementary teacher Christina Casias said getting the backpacks and supplies builds the students’ self-esteem and encourages good attitudes in the classroom.

“There are always some students who don’t have the supplies, and it’s hard for them to see some kids with piles of stuff,” she said.

### **Group wants to give back**

The motorcycle club members, some of whom live in the valley full-time and others who are second-home owners, said they see the gifts as a way to give back to the valley.

“(We) do a lot of events like rides across the country and trips around the world, but we also want to contribute to the community,” club member and Edwards resident Al Mattson said.

The money for the backpack giveaway and other community programs is raised through the group’s yearly fundraiser. The Rider Cup is a three-day event in August with a golf tournament, motorcycle rides, gala and auctions. This year’s event raised more than \$500,000.

The association also provides textbooks to Colorado Mountain College students through their Ride to Success program, and has contributed to Habitat for Humanity and the Shaw Cancer Center. Allen said the group hopes to continue supporting local education.

### **Delivering the loot**

Some of the club members were just as excited to give out the gifts as the students were to receive them.

A chorus of “thank yous” went up from the students as they picked up their backpacks. Even as they filed back into lines to go back to class, many whispered thanks in their hushed “inside voices.”

“It was exciting to see all these little kids getting new things,” said club member Patty Strunk. “They just get these big smiles on their faces.”

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