

# News

### Our Town

# Officials stress partnership between schools, community

By ROB GLIDDEN  
STAFF WRITER

As the faculty and staff of the Southington school system commemorated a new school year with their annual "convocation" event, officials placed a special emphasis on partnerships between the schools and other aspects of the community.

"A community is not just people in a common place," said Assistant Superintendent Howard Thiery. "A real community is one that reaches beyond the needs of individuals, and this community has found extraordinary ways to reach out in difficult times."

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Erardi recognized several individuals and organizations that had helped enhance the school district despite difficult budget years.

A prominent example of this is the new Southington Public Schools Breakfast Program.

The program is a cooperative effort between the schools, Bread for Life, and several other local organizations.

This program will offer free breakfast to students in response to concerns that kids were coming to school with an empty stomach.

Bread for Life's leaders recently extended this service to all the elementary schools.

"We would like to thank the hundreds of Southington individuals, business-

es, churches and civic organizations that give generously to our Annual Giving Appeal," said Bill McDougall, executive director of Bread for Life in a statement. "It is with this support that enables us to fund this very valuable breakfast program."

Numerous other organizations were recognized, including the Southington Education Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce's internship program, and even two students who spent their summer collecting donations for needy residents from local businesses.

"We met the challenge of last year, and we didn't do it alone," Erardi said.

The Southington Town-Wide Effort to Promote Success (STEPS) is another group with close ties to the school system, and its leaders urged the crowd of teachers and other school staff to join with them in trying to cast a "safety net" around students.

YMCA Executive Director John Myers said that trying to keep kids out of trouble was more difficult today than it might have been 40 or 50 years ago.

"Your jobs are more complex now than they have ever been," he said. "Back



TAMMI KNAPIK

Southington students returned to school Monday morning.

Above, JZ, of the Zumpzone in Waterbury, greets children getting off the bus at Thalberg.

then, teachers dealt with gum chewing and maybe a prankster switching the sugar with the salt."

As with previous years, the gathering honored new teachers and teachers who are reaching the milestone of thirty years in Southington.

The event also formally honors the Teacher of the Year, and the 2010-2011 honoree is Kelley Elementary School Literacy Specialist Jill Chapman.

During her remarks, she

used passages from "Courage," a children's book by Bernard Weber, to illustrate the fortitude she said would be necessary to keep Southington students on track.

After telling some anecdotes about students who initially struggled with reading before growing to love it, she said she had seen a district-wide improvement in student literacy.

"The culture has changed, and fosters kids who love reading and writing," Chapman said. "I hope we keep growing this as young readers become teen

readers and finally adult lifelong readers."

For students, the school year formally began a few days later, on Monday, August 30.

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