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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Batavia Teachers' Association Highlights Thanksgiving Season Fundraisers Supporting Local Families

Batavia, New York — November 25, 2025 — The **Batavia Teachers' Association (BTA)**, representing nearly 300 professional educators and support staff across Batavia's five public schools, is proud to highlight two member-organized initiatives aimed at supporting families in need during the Thanksgiving season: the long-running Thanksgiving Food Drive led by Eric Knapp of John Kennedy Intermediate School, and the Peanut Butter & Jelly Drive created by John McCarthy of Batavia High School.

These efforts reflect the Association's deep, ongoing commitment to serving the children and families of Batavia beyond the classroom.

Thanksgiving Food Drive: A 20-Year Tradition of Service

The annual Thanksgiving Food Drive, organized by John Kennedy Elementary School counselor **Eric Knapp**, has been a cornerstone of community support since 2005.

“I began doing the Thanksgiving Food Drive in 2005 while working at BMS,” Knapp explained. “This was originally just a BMS initiative and over the years it has grown to a K-12 Thanksgiving Food Drive helping so many kids.”

Each year, the drive collects hundreds of food items that go to more than a dozen families, so that they can enjoy a prosperous Thanksgiving meal. This year, Association members donated more than **1,000 food items**, supporting **approximately 15 families** and just under **100 adults and children**.

The initiative is strengthened through local partnerships and volunteerism. According to Knapp, “Each year Wegman's donates a \$200.00 gift card, Lawley Insurance donates gift cards, the Batavia Police Department and the Batavia Fire Dept help our students organize and deliver the food to families.”

The Thanksgiving drive is one of several service projects led by Knapp, who also coordinates John Kennedy's annual Christmas toy drive for Golisano Children's Hospital. Hundreds of toys are donated by John Kennedy students and staff, but the giving extends beyond the walls of the school.

"For the toy drive, the BPD Union raises money and purchases several hundred dollars worth of toys to add to our Golisano Hospital Toy Drive."

Knapp, widely appreciated by students and families for his compassion and leadership, says community service is central to his purpose as an educator and human being:

"I entered the education field with the hopes of having a positive impact on the lives of kids. As my role has developed, I use the food/toy drive to not only instill a sense of caring for others in our students [...] So often we take life for granted and events like these open our eyes to others that may not be as blessed as we are [...] It is an amazing opportunity to help other people and to make their life just a little easier or a little happier."

Knapp's dedication is rooted in values shared with his family and bolstered by his own health struggles.

"Mrs. Knapp and I have always tried to model kindness, respect and helping others with our own 5 kids," he said. "Being able to have a positive impact on the lives of someone is truly a gift so we try to take advantage of that as much as we possibly can. As of 5 years ago I was diagnosed with cancer which has opened my eyes to what truly is important in life. It is my hope that by organizing these types of community service projects, I can inspire people to realize the true significance of having a positive and caring human spirit."

Peanut Butter & Jelly Drive: Meeting Community Needs in a Challenging Year

At Batavia High School, social studies teacher **John McCarthy** launched a new service initiative this year: a Peanut Butter & Jelly Drive to benefit the Salvation Army.

McCarthy, who began teaching in Batavia in 2001, shared that the idea grew out of concerns about food insecurity and the broader national climate at the time.

"The state of our US Government — the shutdown/SNAP cuts... something needed to be done to make sure our students/community had a food option," he said.

McCarthy sees the drive as a way to provide immediate help while also modeling civic responsibility for students.

"Many of our BCSD students are hungry. Food fuels the mind and body. PB & J isn't a gourmet meal but will help in a pinch. I also want our students to see that the adults in their building care for not just them but the entire BCSD community. Small acts of kindness go a long way. Maybe as these students become adults they themselves may organize a drive or volunteer."

While he has participated in other community efforts, this is McCarthy's first time organizing a drive himself. His goal is simple and direct: "Plenty of PB&J for the Salvation Army to help those in need."

A Community of Educators Dedicated to Helping Families

The Batavia Teachers' Association applauds the compassion, leadership, and initiative demonstrated by Mr. Knapp and Mr. McCarthy. Their efforts reflect the values shared across all five district schools — a belief that educators not only teach, but uplift, support, and advocate for the families they serve.

These fundraisers underscore the BTA's commitment to strengthening the Batavia community. Batavia teachers care and the exist to serve the children and families of the city community.

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