

Tea Party Helps Tots

By MARIE P. GRADY

When Megan Youngling Carannante and Tiffany Spinella see the latest headlines about the increasing number of children living in poverty and hunger, they can do more than just cringe and look away. That's because the young associates at Pullman & Comley are doing something about it.

Members of the Junior League of Hartford, they volunteer their time to provide desperately needed help to those in need. That includes stuffing backpacks full of food so children and their families will have enough to eat once the last school bell rings on Fridays.

"You're really making a meaningful difference in their lives," said Carannante, co-chair of the Junior League's Backpack Program.

The program was the beneficiary of Pullman & Comley's "Women's Tea," which was held at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford Oct. 12. Diane Whitney, chair of the firm's Women's Leadership Initiative, said the event is part of a 15-year tradition that brings together firm lawyers and clients while connecting them with community needs.

Wendy Avery, president of the Junior League of Hartford, told dozens of women who attended that their support couldn't come at a better time. About 130,000 people are believed to be living with hunger in the Greater Hartford area, with about 50,000 of them children.

"Programs like this really grow bit by bit. Being able to get the program in front of very smart, well connected women is very important," she said.

Carannante said the League offers the Backpack Program with the assistance



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Pullman & Comley's Women's Tea benefited a Junior League of Hartford program that provides food to 25 needy children weekly. From left to right at the Wadsworth Atheneum event are Wendy Avery, president of the League; Diane Whitney, Chair, Pullman & Comley's Women's Leadership Initiative; and Megan Carannante, an attorney with Pullman & Comley and co-chair of the League's Backpack Program.

of the Village for Families and Children's Family Resource Center at the Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School. The bags are packed at the Unitarian Society of Hartford's pantry.

Under the program, 25 enrolled children receive food on Friday for six meals, two snacks and one full meal for their families. Because no one can see the food inside, the child doesn't suffer any stigma from the knowledge that others know his family needs help.

The program, which began in 2006, supplements others that ensure children in need receive nutritious food. Most needy children qualify for government-subsidized free or reduced price meals at school.

But those programs are not available on

weekends or after classes end for the day. Carannante said the thanks expressed by families is heart warming. She said Pullman & Comley has been very supportive of the effort, as well as pro bono legal efforts by attorneys.

The League, which has about 500 members, also runs The Clothes Horse shop in West Hartford, which offers quality used clothing and household items at affordable prices, using proceeds to benefit other projects. Spinella is co-chair of that project.

Guests at the event also got to see some of the nearly 50,000 works of art at the Atheneum. They were greeted by Susan Talbott, museum director and CEO, who introduced Cathy Malloy, the governor's wife. ■