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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Daily Leader

On average, most teachers spend between \$500 and \$1,000 out-of-pocket per year to purchase supplies for their students and classrooms.

This year, Great Lakes Airlines is partnering with all of the school districts in the 61 communities it serves, including locally with USD No. 480, to help educators purchase additional supplies for students.

Through the month of January, people can bring a school supply item to the Great Lakes counter at the Liberal Mid-America Regional Airport at 720 Terminal Road. Donations will be accepted Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Weekend hours are limited.

Great Lakes Regional Sales Manager Kassi Mohlenkamp said the school supply drive is a first for the company.

“We always try to partner with the local communities, but we don’t do a lot of donations to our K-12 organizations,” she said. “It was our way of giving back to them to the schools with the teachers having to buy so many of the supplies in the middle of the year.”

Mohlenkamp said having a drive in January allows teachers to restock their inventory of

supplies.

“All of them take place at the beginning of the year, and in the middle of the year, they start running low again,” she said. “We thought we would refuel and replenish the second half of the year for them and try to get some extra supplies.”

Mohlenkamp said Great Lakes is planning to make the drive an annual event.

“We will continue doing the Liberal school district unless we get any other calls or concerns about another district,” she said. “We are doing this in every community we serve except for our hubs.”

According to Mohlenkamp, 13 million U.S. children live below the poverty line, making it difficult for them to purchase supplies.

“I think it’s hard to supply them with all the supplies that they’re supposed to have and to make that last throughout the year,” she said. “We’re just trying to do our part and see if we can get the community involved as well.”

The 61 cities Great Lakes serves are in 16 states. The company also did a food drive last summer in Liberal, which Mohlenkamp said followed a similar concept to this one.

“We did the same thing because a lot of people have food drives during the holidays during the end of the year,” she said. “We did ours in the middle of the year in July to help replenish them in the times they’re starting to run out again.”

The food drives likewise took place in the other communities Great Lakes serves, and all together, a total of three tons of food was raised.

“We’re hoping that the school supply drive is just as successful, and we’ll get as many participants,” Mohlenkamp said. “We’re also giving away the round trip tickets. When people go in and donate, they can sign up, and we’re doing a drawing every week. A little bit of incentive to maybe go in and drop off a pack of pencils.”

Mohlenkamp said Great Lakes may plan other events to help its communities, but she is unsure of what those may be or when they would take place.

“I think we’re going to stick with these and see how they pan out,” she said. “This is the first time we’ll do this one, so we’re going to see how these work first. We may in the future, but I think we’re sticking to these two right now.”

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