

Local Capri Sun Plant Donates \$2.6 Million Filtered Drinking Water Packages To Local School Districts

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GRANITE CITY - As the COVID-19 Pandemic continues to create havoc both in the United States and around the world, finding reliable sources of drinking water, especially with many water fountains in public places having been turned off because of the pandemic, has become almost paramount. Sales of bottled water has increased due to the pandemic, and in Granite City, a local plant that many people may not be aware of has stepped up to help school students and their families.

The Capri Sun plant in Granite, a local manufacturer of the popular fruit drink pouches, has donated 2.6 million pouches of filtered drinking water to local school districts, with the water having been delivered to the schools this past week.

That the Granite City plant was the choice to distribute the pouches was a very easy choice. It's one of three plants nationwide to make the drink, and serves the Midwest region as its point of distribution.

"One of the things was that it's all centralized around Granite City," said Jeff Garde, the territory business manager for KraftHeinz, the makers of Capri Sun, "and Granite is the heart and soul of our operations. That's where the manufacturing plant is, one of three plants, and Capri Sun is made here in the Midwest."

It's a very important part of the local economy, where steel is still the most important part of Granite City, and what the city is best known for.

"Whenever people think of Granite City, they think of steel," Garde said, "and not many know that Granite City produces the Capri Sun pouches."

The idea of distributing water pouches came about at the start of the pandemic in March. KraftHeinz's world headquarters are based in Chicago, and the company asked local students what was needed most there. The response was drinking water, as the fountains were being turned off due to the fear of spreading the virus via shared fountains.

"It was early in the game for COVID," Garde said, "and we had no idea the fountains were shut off."

It turned out to be a very herculean task to convert the Granite City Capri Sun plant from making the juices to making the water. The plant lines had to be converted from juice to just water while making sure that all Illinois state regulations were met. The packaging and marketing divisions, as with all the company's divisions, became involved in the project, which started in March, and eventually resulted in the delivery of the water pouches to the school districts.



Alton, Vandalia, Bethalto, Litchfield, Granite City, Collinsville, Triad, Edwardsville and Staunton's school districts, along with schools in Troy and Glen Carbon, were the local beneficiaries of the project, with the 2.6 million pouches being delivered to the schools. And even with many of the schools still being closed due to the pandemic, Garde is still very optimistic.

"We're crossing our fingers that the schools will reopen in January," Garde said. "But if not, they can still use the water for remote and backpack meal plans."

The water pouches especially come in handy for backpack plans, as in the case of many of the kids, their lunch is a very important meal.

"The backpack lunches are really important, because for many of the kids, lunch is their most important meal," Garde said. "With the backpack program, the kids can still get that meal."

It also creates less stress on their parents, as they have one less thing to worry about when it comes to lunchtime for their kids. And it also lessens the burdens for the individual school districts as well.

"The main goal was to alleviate one more thing for the districts and parents," Garde said, "because the districts are paying for extra supplies with COVID, such as sanitizer and masks, and other things that weren't budgeted for when COVID started. So this was one less thing to worry about."

From a practical standpoint, it's a very simple thing: Everyone's has to keep up their water intake, especially now with the pandemic still in progress.

"For us, everybody's gotta stay hydrated, and this was kind of a healthy option," Garde said. "Capri Sun has sugar, juice and other things. The filtered water's a necessity, because the fountains have same thing as well."

From the company's point of view, it's giving back to the communities and school districts, as well as lessening the burdens of everyone, and it's a very important part of the project as well.

"Our one thing, for KraftHeinz's standpoint, was giving back to the community and school districts," Garde said, "and helping the students and parents. It all filters down, because the parents have to pack the kids' lunches, and it's one less thing they've got to worry about."

All the school districts who benefitted are very appreciative of KraftHeinz's and Capri Sun's efforts in helping the students and their families out during a very difficult time. And it's brought a lot of personal satisfaction and pride to Garde as well.

"It's extremely satisfying," Garde said. "I've been with KraftHeinz for 21 years, and this has been the most satisfying project I've ever worked on."