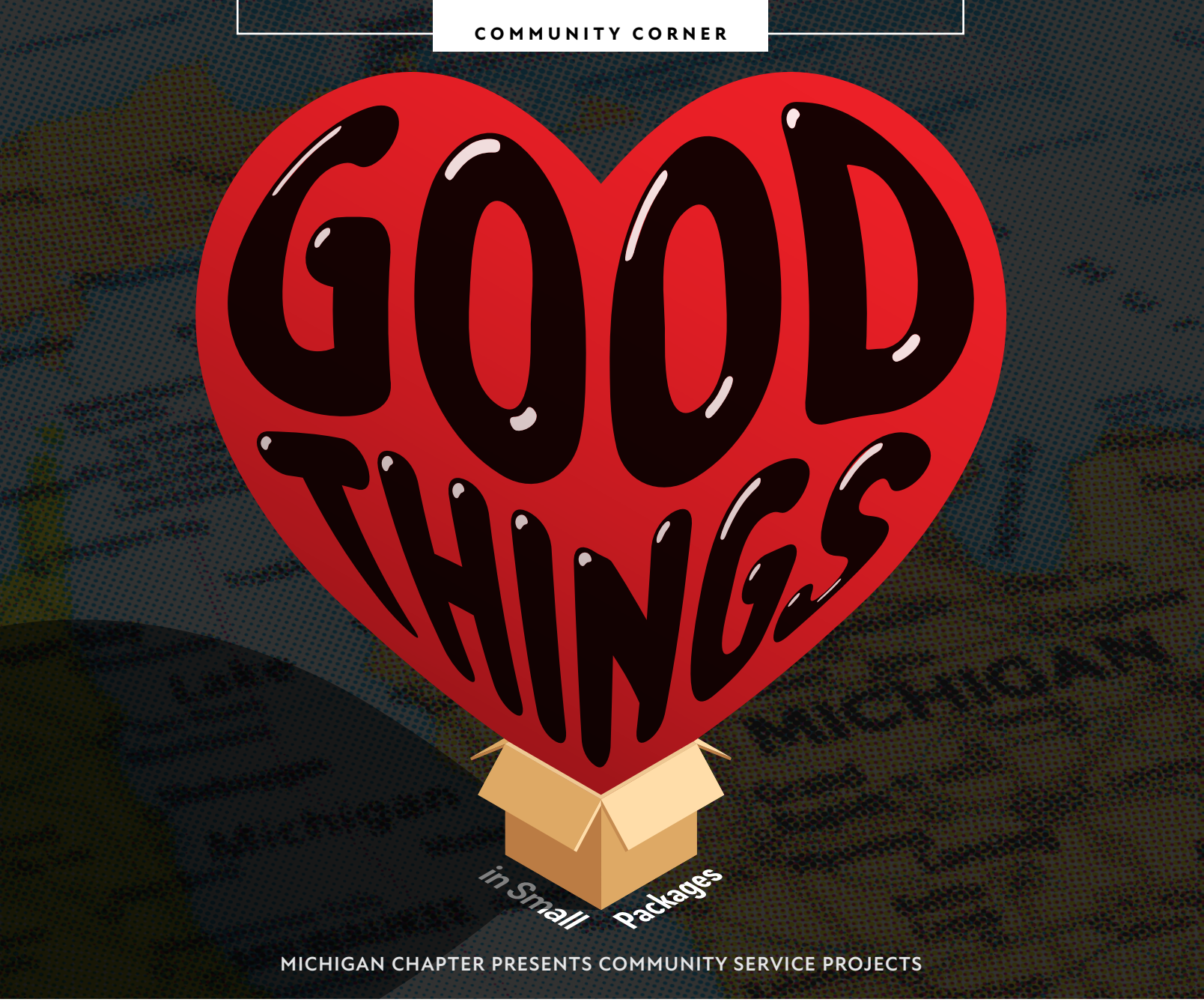


MICHIGAN CHAPTER PRESENTS COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

By Kelli Smith

Mistie Atkins, CMA (AAMA), president-elect and community outreach chair of Michigan's Northwest Chapter of Medical Assistants, describes her local chapter as a "small but mighty group." With about seven medical assistants who show up to every local chapter meeting and participate in their community service projects each year, she is spot-on. This tight-knit group of dedicated medical assistants does a great deal for their community, usually choosing about three community service projects per year to carry out.

"We live in a rural community, and it's really important to give back to our community that we all live [in] and serve," explains Atkins. "It's something that's really important to our chapter and the people that attend the meetings. It's a passion of mine as well. And by doing these community outreach projects, we can give back."

While the chapter has a great passion for helping others, they also enjoy informing their community about the medical assisting profession through their service. "Shockingly enough, a lot of people in the community still don't realize what medical assistants are," says Atkins. "So, it's kind of [a] dual purpose of giving back to the community but also educating the community on medical assisting in their community as well."

Last year, the chapter chose to serve Munson Manor Hospitality House, Northwest Education Services Career Tech, and Leelanau Christian Neighbors' Blessings in a Backpack program, all of which are near and dear to medical assistants of the Northwest Chapter.

Here is a breakdown of each of the Northwest Chapter's community service projects and how they made a difference to these communities this past year.

Munson Manor Hospitality House

Munson Manor Hospitality House in Traverse City, Michigan, houses out-of-town patients, family members, and caregivers who need a place to stay during a loved one's

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hospitalization at Munson Medical Center.[1] They have a Family Dinner Volunteer Program for guests in which volunteers help supply dinners for individuals staying at Munson Manor.

Once a year, the Northwest Chapter makes a meal, serves it, and sits down to eat with the residents of Munson Manor. Usually, the people staying there want to share their story.

"It's really rewarding to get to hear their [stories] and be part of that," states Atkins. "We see a lot of families there [for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)]. So, we had a couple [whose] baby had been in the NICU for several weeks and was going to be there for several more weeks. They were essentially living at the manor while she was still breastfeeding and had to go over [to the hospital] all the time. And so, it's always meaningful when you meet a NICU family."

They typically volunteer around the holidays to provide meals during difficult times in the residents' lives. "They're always so appreciative of a [freshly] cooked meal, because either they're eating cafeteria food or they're getting pizza. So, to be able to eat like a home-cooked meal is usually pretty impactful for them—[and] to be able to just sit down and take a minute and share their story."

Atkins enjoys how this volunteering project is people-facing, and the chapter really gets to feel the impact they are making on these residents' days.

Career Tech Center

Northwest Education Services Career Tech in Traverse City, Michigan, provides students with academic and technical skills, as well as knowledge and training in high-demand careers, such as medical assisting.[2] They have a closet dedicated to personal care items and snacks for students who are in need of food or items such as deodorant or toothbrushes.

Atkins connected to the school because of its medical assisting program and because one of the Northwest Chapter members works there. "I'm pretty involved in that program," she says. "I go and talk to the students [every year] about medical assisting so that they can make a good, informed choice. And I'm trying to sway them to get as many medical assistants as possible in that program."

Though Atkins knew there was a need for these items in her community, she did not know the need was so profound at the school. "I've been going to Career Tech center for years and years to teach [and] do some outreach through the health science class. And I didn't know until this last year that they had a need for basic things for their students," explains Atkins. "So that really surprised me. I didn't realize that there were students out there that needed deodorant and some of these basic things. So that was an eye-opener for me."

Blessings in a Backpack

Leelanau Christian Neighbors' Blessings in a Backpack program is a hands-on initiative that helps alleviate weekend hunger by providing food to children throughout Leelanau County. Each week during the school year, students in need receive a backpack full of nutritious food to get them through the weekend.[3] Students who receive assistance through this program receive their items in a backpack so it is can be given to them discreetly and other students do not have to know that they are receiving help from the organization.

When Atkins delivered cartloads of food to them before Christmas break, they were thrilled. "You couldn't fit one more thing in my car, … and I think it was three full cartloads full of food," says Atkins. "We purposely did that one last year before Christmas break because they send extra food home, because a lot of the kids only eat when they're at school. They get the free breakfast and the free lunch, and then they go home and a lot of times don't have dinner.

"There was a big need through [the] Thanksgiving holiday and Christmas holiday where they were off a week and then two weeks for Christmas," she continues. "So, they were really appreciative because that was stocking them up to be able to do the extra food for the holidays."

Small but Mighty

As a medical assistant, community service means a great deal to Atkins and the rest of her local chapter.

"[What community service means to me is] just being there and showing up for our community, educating them, teaching them, [and] helping them," she says. "We have an amazing community where we live and just want to continue to support our community." ✦

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