

SunSentinel

HEROES & HELPERS

Junior League's Diaper Bank to ensure every family in need has supply

BY SCOTT LUXOR

The Junior League of Boca Raton is continuing its efforts to make sure thousands of babies will have diapers this year through its Diaper Bank. The need is even greater with parents facing unemployment and other setbacks because of the coronavirus shutdown.

Cristy Stewart-Harfmann, the league's president, said that over the years, they have distributed over 3 million diapers to families in need through 22 partner agencies. They distribute over 600,000 diapers each year through the program.

"We're always looking for what's the unmet need in the community," she said. "We look at where we can make the greatest impact. The Diaper Drive [which took place in March] is one of those areas we feel we can have that impact."

"Diapers are a big expense, estimated at about \$100 a month per child," Stewart-Harfmann said. That adds up to \$1,200 per year, for a basic item that all babies need.

With the impact of the coronavirus, agencies are reaching out to the league for help.

"A lot of the people who we serve are hourly employees who won't be getting paid when they have to stay at home because of the health crisis. They're really going to need the support," she said.

"One of the other challenges for the diaper expense is that they are in the same category as alcohol, pet food and ammunition, so you can't use it with any of your government benefits," she said. "The money has to come out of their pockets."

"A lot of our clients who have spent 'out of pocket' for diapers don't have transportation," Stewart-Harfmann said. "So then they're going to like a 7-Eleven or somewhere like that to buy them, where they're more expensive. If they had their own transportation, they could get them for less money."

"These families need to have diapers in order to go to daycare," she said. "It's this terrible cycle of poverty. Either you're leaving your child in a diaper for too long, then health issues come up, or they're just not able to go to work at all because they can't come up with the diapers needed to drop their kids off at daycare."

"Our goal is not to provide all the diapers, but we're trying to be that stopgap support at the end of the paycheck," she said.

Companies helping out

Stewart-Harfmann said businesses are often looking for ways to help, but they don't always want to give up the hours in the office, and she said they're not exactly sure where they're going to make the biggest impact.

"We had over 30 businesses participate this year," she said about the March drive. "We educated them on the diaper need in Palm Beach County, then they let their clients or employees bring in the diapers."

"It's been so much fun getting the photos from the businesses. They're so excited," she said. "We had at one company donate over 11,000 diapers. I think it's just incredible. They just rally their employees. They're really behind it because it's an easy way to make a big impact."

Recently, donations have been made by Boca West Children's Foundation, All Star Recruiting and All My Sons Moving & Storage.

Wouldn't it make sense that a diaper producer would support a program like this?

"Huggies is actually part of the reason that we have the program," Stewart-Harfmann said. "Huggies is the sponsor of the National Diaper Bank Network. Junior League of Boca is actually in the top 10% of all the diaper banks around the country, based on the number of diapers we've collected."

Nonprofits receive diapers

The Junior League of Boca Raton Diaper Bank last month distributed 100,000 diapers to 19 nonprofit agencies. Junior League volunteers filled trucks and a school bus with diapers as representatives from the nonprofits arrived in 15-minute intervals at a storage facility.

Nonprofits that received diapers included Caridad Center, Children's First Academy, Children's Healing Institute, Drug Abuse Foundation, Farmworker Coordinating Council, Florence Fuller Child Development Center, Guatemalan Maya Center, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Palm Beach, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Palm Beach, Mary Help of Christians Church, Mary's Pregnancy Resource Center, Milagro Center, Opportunity, Place of Hope, Redlands Christian Migrant Association Belle Glade, Redlands Christian Migrant Association Farmworkers CDC, Speak Up for Kids (Guardian ad Litem)



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF BOCA RATON

Junior League of Boca Raton volunteers load diapers into the Florence Fuller Child Development Center bus.



ALL MY SONS

All My Sons Moving & Storage recently transported and delivered 280,000 diapers in support of the Junior League of Boca Raton's Diaper Bank.

and The Open Door.

Some of the diapers were secured through the organization's Amazon wish-list and some were made possible through monetary donations, according to the league.

"It's a great way to hopefully stop the cycle of poverty," Stewart-Harfmann said.

"One in three families can't afford diapers. They sometimes have to make that decision whether they should eat tonight, or make sure they have diapers for their child to go to daycare tomorrow."

Visit jlb.org/impact/diaper-bank/, email diaperbank@jlb.org or call 561-620-2553.

Community brings out pots and pans for salute to heroes

BY STEVE WEST

Vizcaya residents took their pots and pans out of the kitchen and into the streets of their Delray Beach community recently to make some noise. Not to be outdone, nine fire trucks, nine police cars from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, a contingent of nine cars from the community's own citizen observer patrol brigade and others harmonized with the residents in a cacophony of noise.

The participating vehicles were organized into a lineup in the staging area of the clubhouse parking lot. The cavalcade was led by an honor guard of seven Patriot Guard Riders on their Harley Davidson motorcycles festooned with American flags.

The honorees appreciatively honked their horns, blew their sirens, revved their engines and flashed their lights as they lit up the streets like a giant pinball machine. For 40 minutes, they snaked their way past all 504 homes in the gated community off Atlantic Avenue.

The residents said they had a desire to somehow give a significant "thank you" to those people who are keeping civilization going during the coronavirus pandemic. The question was how to do that in a safe and meaningful way.

"It was great to have the Honoring Heroes Parade last night," resident Yvonne Stamatellos said. "Neighbors seeing each other laughing, making noises and simply being grateful to those who give their time to others unselfishly. It was a wonderful antidote to combat this past difficult period."

It was not only law enforcement and medical workers the community wanted to show its appreciation for, but also the postal workers, the sanitary truck operators, pharmacists, food industry workers, delivery drivers and those who work directly in Vizcaya from the gatekeepers to the gardeners to the office workers.

"It sure was great with all who participated both in the parade and in the drive-ways," resident Gail Weyuker said. "A spectacular experience. Now if we could only spread all that this accomplished in our community to the rest of the country, we'd have a better world. I can't wipe the smile off my face and in my heart."

As much as the parade brightened up



VISUAL JASON PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOS

Vizcaya residents held up homemade signs to thank their heroes during a drive-by parade.



Patriot Guard Riders rode their motorcycles through Vizcaya as part of a parade to thank first responders and others.

the community, so did it move the honorees. Their enthusiastic waves and bright smiles told the surface story.

"I've been in this business for 35 years and I've never seen anything like this — not even close," said Palm Beach County Fire Rescue Battalion 4 District Chief Tony Tozzi.

To put the event together, many residents stepped forward to make signs, contribute ideas, call others, take photos and videos and take care of every aspect of the event. Vizcaya residents said they encourage other communities to find ways to say thanks to the heroes.



CONVIVA

Dr. Isabel Souffront, managing partner, Conviva; Paco Velez, president and CEO Feeding South Florida; and Rosalinda Roman, vice president and general manager, Broward County Conviva Care Solutions present the donation.

Feeding South Florida receives \$750K donation from Conviva Care Centers

BY BRETT SHWEKY

Feeding South Florida, the largest food bank serving Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, recently received a \$750,000 donation from Conviva Care Centers to support feeding people affected by the coronavirus shutdown.

Conviva Care Centers will be donating \$2 million to food banks in Florida and Texas to help ensure the older population has adequate and healthy food supplies. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Feeding South Florida has seen a 600 percent increase in demand and has been working to respond to the increased food needs.

"We applaud all of the hard work and dedication Feeding South Florida's incredible team is putting forward during a time when supplying access to healthy food is so critical," Kevin Meriwether, president of Conviva Care Solutions, said in a statement. "We're honored to do what we can to show our support and appreciation, while also continuing to help treat our patients and the community. Our relationship with the food bank is very important to us, and we're proud to call them our partners."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Feeding South Florida has coordinated with Feeding America, Feeding Florida and

other government agencies to help schedule drive-thru food distributions for those affected by the crisis. With help from food donors and restaurants, the nonprofit has been able to distribute meals in all four counties at multiple dates during the week.

Feeding South Florida has distributed over 21 million pounds of food or 17.5 million meals in the four counties it serves in seven weeks, which in a 12-month span will equal 156 million pounds or 130 million meals. In comparison, last year the local organization gave away 62 million pounds of food or 51.6 million meals.

Conviva, which has 90 locations throughout Florida and Texas, comprises over 300 primary care physicians and over 800 affiliated specialists that provide healthcare services for patients that require daily assistance, such as senior care activity centers or 24/7 on-call physicians.

"We are grateful to Conviva for its \$750,000 transformational gift toward ending hunger for older adults throughout South Florida," Paco Velez, president and CEO of Feeding South Florida, said in a statement. "With Conviva's support, Feeding South Florida will continue putting food on the tables of those most at-risk and in need of our assistance during this critical time."

Visit feedingsouthflorida.org.