

# Saying It's a Labor of Love is an Understatement

By Jim Mancuso  
East Meadow Club

One Kiwanis project I have been fortunate to take part in for the last several years is the Nassau County Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged.



The multi-day event, held in Garden City, Long Island, has an impact like few others I have seen in the Kiwanis world. The signature project of West Hempstead Kiwanis, and conducted by its President and First Lady George and Sandi Silkes, distributes thousands of toys for free to all the child athletes who compete in this Olympic-style sporting event. Accumulating all of the toys each year through donations (both funds, toys and other items) and staffing the event is a daunting task which they have performed professionally for years as a labor of love.

The first time I took part in the event, was nothing less than life-changing. The reasons for feeling this way were three-fold.

1: The children themselves, some with beyond imagination physical deformities and others with great mental handicaps are a joy to be around and so appreciative. There was one child whose head was of typical size but with a body and arms that were several orders of magnitude too small (in a wheelchair and using a breathing apparatus as well). He was outgoing and had a sense of humor, which was unexpected given his situation. Another,



whose body could be described as being bent into the shape of a "pretzel." At an event like this you truly realize how fortunate you are and why as Kiwanians we do what we do.

2: The parents of these severely handicapped children amazed with their loving nature and positive attitudes. They do not see their kids as burdens but rather as blessings. On an everyday basis, they deal with challenges, taking care of these children in ways few of us can imagine. And, they do it with happiness in their hearts, which is truly inspiring.

3: Dignity. That is the real gift, which is given to these children. Yes, they get excited when picking out toys by the dozen. But, what they get even more excited about is participating in games where they can feel just like everyone else. In a Frisbee competition I watched, the disk only actually went a foot or so when thrown, due to the physical deformities of the child. In their heart, though, I could see that Frisbee went miles as the child was able to take part in a sport like they had seen other kids, but they were never able to do so before.

By the way, other Kiwanis clubs help at this event. Garden City flips hamburgers; Nassau University Medical Center applies temporary tattoos and other club members (like me) contribute by staffing booths and distributing toys and prizes (every child who attends is guaranteed to get a toy). More clubs, like my own in East Meadow, also donate funds in support of toy purchases.

The next games take place June 2, and I plan to be there. If you are a nearby club or just in the neighborhood come see for yourself. If you do, I promise it will be a life-changing event for you too. My great thanks to George and Sandi who have dedicated countless hours to this cause and help to fulfill the Kiwanis mission of serving the children of the world.

## Lyme Disease Foundation Receives Letter of Thanks

Stephanie Szymanski and family  
1605 Marion Ln  
East Aurora, NY 14052

March 29, 2017

Dear Kiwanis Clubs and New York District Pediatric Lyme Foundation;

On behalf of Stephanie Szymanski and our family, we would like to thank you and your Foundation for all the financial help given to us for the past three years in Stephanie's battle with Lyme disease. Your generosity of \$50,000 has helped our family get Stephanie the much needed testing's and treatments for Lyme disease. She has gone through neurological testing and consultation with a neurologist in New York City; 40 dives of hyperbaric treatments as well as consultation appointments along with doctor prescribed supplements with a local doctor in Buffalo; 4 treatments of plasma exchange at an infusion center in Connecticut and 3 years of out-of-town doctor consultation appointments and blood testing in Connecticut. We have seen some improvement and we cannot thank you enough for all you have done.

Not only did we receive financial support we also received comfort, understanding and kind words from Mr. John and Rose Marie Gridley as well our local Kiwanis Club members. This organization has a strong constitution in helping children and families get through these financially burden times with Lyme disease.

Now that we have come to the end of our journey with your organization, I feel a sense of sadness and hope. The support you have given us has made a difference in our lives. I wish your organization prosperity and success in helping other families. Once again, thank for all that you have done.

Sincerely,

*Stephanie Szymanski and family*

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