

Dear Governor Joe,

Peninsula Kiwanis of Hewlett, Christmas Dream project started twenty years ago with the simple goal of ensuring that local children have presents to open on Christmas morning.

Since then, our goals have expanded to providing clothing, underwear, socks, school supplies, and snacks to the neediest children of our community all year round.

Our club has used tried and true methods of raising funds for this high flying project. In the fall we conduct our Pancake Breakfast, raising thousands of dollars. Spring heralds our annual St. Patrick's Day raffle netting over ten thousand dollars. More recently, a fun and successful event is our homemade wine contest which attracts a dozen winemakers and 180 wine enthusiasts.

Every dollar we raise is distributed back to the community. Most of our members were born and raised in the area we serve. We hail from the small community of Inwood, New York which has been described by some as the stepchild of the affluent Five Towns. Of course we have a different opinion. To most of us it's mom and apple pie, or more likely cannoli. A generation ago this neighborhood consisted of mostly Italian and Albanian immigrants with a large contingent of African Americans. Today the neighborhood has a large influx of Spanish immigrants with their own set of needs and culture. Our members felt the pulse of this ethnically diverse community and discovered their main need was to learn English. We also discovered that residents were suspicious and fearful of local government.

With that in mind, we decided to start our own language center at the local church basement without any government assistance and with a no questions asked policy. Many of our members are skilled in the building trades. We can build just about anything. Our club made computer workstations from used doors and we acquired second hand computers from our professional members. Our teachers acquired English as a second language software from generous sources. Last year over eighty residents per night were using our weekly tutoring sections.

This summer we stepped out of the box. Our good old boy club teamed up with an unlikely partner who shared our goal of helping the children of the community. The charitable women of the National Council of Jewish Women invited our club to participate in their "back to school boutique." The NCJW were able to secure donations of a huge amount of children's wear from local manufacturers. They had the space, a local temple basement, the attire and the will. What they did not have was an identifiable pool of children in need. We did! We volunteered our manpower and contacts and in return over 50 of our Christmas Dream kids received new clothing and supplies.

On the day of the event twenty of our members volunteered as personal shoppers and fitters. We even hired school buses to take our kids to the boutique and donated financially to the cause. What a day!

I often wonder why my club does so much good for so many. I think the answer is that we care because someone cared for us. We are just passing it on. Another reason is the joy we feel when we see a kid open a Christmas present or lace up a new pair of sneakers. We are not just giving things away, we are bettering a community, we are giving a kid dignity. Money and fame is no substitute for a good deed well done!

Last month our past president, Thomas Delgione was interviewed by "The Herald." When asked about our participation in Christmas Dream he said, "It's a lot of work but it's also a lot of fun. No matter how bad things get for us, we do what we can and it's heartwarming to say the least."

I echo Tom's sentiment and add, God bless us everyone.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph DeSena, Jr.", with a stylized, cursive script.

Ralph DeSena, Jr.