

August 22, 2019

GUEST COLUMNIST

Bucks 4 Kids

I ran into one of my favorite Bucks Countians at the gym, writer Marian Callahan. She was taking her first gym class after an emergency appendectomy. I lent her my hair clip. After class Marian told me of a piece she was writing for the Intelligencer that features the numerous local Back to School donation drives for kids in need.

I was reminded that we live in a generous community, due perhaps to the area wealth or to our Quaker heritage; probably a combination of both. Every year, hundreds of Bucks County students receive Back to School supplies from a variety of sources.

United Way's Stuff the Bus United Way project, run efficiently by Executive Director Danielle Bush is probably the godfather of local Back to School drives. Every July, Bucks United Way asks all of its associated nonprofits to donate backpacks, gift cards and school supplies. The response is astounding.

Volunteers and staff stuff hundreds of brand-new backpacks, with all kinds of goodies, from spiral notebooks to highlighters to pencil cases stuffed with gel-cap pens. They are safely stored in a warehouse until a particular Monday in August. On that day, a trail of vans and SUV's driven by social workers, caseworkers, teachers and pastors head to Bensalem. Taking as many backpacks as they can carry, these volunteers distribute them to kids they know need them but who can't afford them.

Diane Meyer of Children and Youth who is in charge of picking up Bucks for Kids backpacks each year, characterizes the giveaway scene, "As a madhouse, worse than Black Friday. But what a great thing for each kid. "

We really do appreciate it, Diane. (Diane has an SUV and three 13-year-old sons to shoulder this burden.)

Imagine not having your school supplies on the first day? Social faux pas. Embarrassing.

Doylestown restaurants, stores, law firms and the Bucks Co. Bar Association are just a few of the many backpack collectors and distributors. It's a September tradition.

This generosity re appears at Christmastime. During my time, a local family was chosen by a business or a parish. You were handed a scrap of paper with the age and sex of the child you were buying for. You didn't know anything else about her. One day a church deacon stopped by the office to pick up the gifts. The gifting was pretty labor intensive and lacked content as you never found out if she liked the gift. Now, it's so much

easier to write a check or buy a gift card. Donations make us feel good. These contributions are worthy causes.

At Bucks for Kids, we supply these types of nice little surprises all year-round. Every month we meet to review and approve requests for hundreds of little and not so little items and services for kids receiving care, soccer cleats, a tutor, money for a class trip, ballet lessons so a little girl can get out of the house on Saturday wearing her pink tutu and her Mom doesn't have to worry about paying the Gymnastics school, as the class is already paid for. We visualize the circumstances.

Starting 30 years ago, I wish we had kept track statistically of various grant categories: male, female, age, geographic location. Parents: deceased, incarcerated, addicted, disappeared, on disability. What a treasure trove for academic analysis. Whatever. The data points don't matter. All the applications are cries for help. The reward is the cumulative effect of good done for Bucks County's future adults.

Bucks 4 Kids grant requests have two "High Seasons" too. In April we are hit with dozens of requests for summer camp tuition and in September dozens seek school supplies and clothes. Plus, we must stash money for the June flood of scholarships, driving lessons and various post graduate needs.

We worry about these kids all year. Our checks (yes we still use checks) are payable directly to the various providers: YMCA, Karate School, Pop Warner, Northampton Baseball League or the caseworker. Never have we had a leftover backpack. Our challenge is stretching the dollars and keeping some in reserve.

It's a unique way to give. In brutish terms, the "needy child" has been prescreened. This is a kid already receiving help. This kid may not need a backpack or a Christmas gift. This kid may need to pay for SAT's. She is working two jobs and graduating from high school in June. This kid needs to meet his two brothers at Hershey Park on the anniversary of their Dad's death so they can remember and honor their Dad's memory in a fun place.

Bucks 4 Kids B4K is like a quick, local "Make a Wish Foundation." But no one is flying to Hawaii or meeting a sports star. Instead, they are trying on a baseball uniform or registering for softball. The kids are having normal experiences that positively shape their lives. With Bucks 4 Kids, you get the most impactful bang for your charity buck.

We are all volunteer. We have been at this for 30 years. We are local. We are a United Way Associate.

Donate to B4k through our website Bucksforkids.org. Donate often. Donate easily. Donate through Amazon Smile. Donate by waiving your juror pay. Support us by voting us Best of Bucks. Join our mailing list. Come to Breakfast With Santa at Applebees on Dec. 1 Attend our Designer Bag Bingo at St. Cyril's on April 24. Touch the future. Help a foster kid.

NANCY LARKIN TAYLOR, ESQ.

**Executive Director
Bucks for Kids
Bucksforkids.org
Bucks4kids6@gmail
P O Box 1711
Doylestown, PA 18901**