

Dear Focus on the Future Sponsors,

The shopping event is now over and what can I say- WOW, thank you- it seems such a little response for touching the lives of so many, and I don't just mean kids! Between the two time slots, we had 38 children and 17 elves, some who were there for both sessions. I think most people found the experience both fulfilling and enjoyable. I was brought to tears more than once throughout the day and evening as I watched children smiling, giggling and thoroughly enjoying themselves. I can honestly say that there were a few of these youngsters for which that smile or giggle is not an everyday sight. So again, I thank you all whether you supported with donations of time or money or prayers.

I have been receiving feedback throughout the past couple of weeks, and I thought perhaps I'd like to tell you all a little more about the programs/assistance of which we/you are now a part.

The very first program we began along these lines was the Mother's Day Gift Boutique. The idea was very similar, and our resources quite limited. Our food pantry coordinator at the time solicited funds to provide every child on free or reduced lunches at the middle school (the one which employs me) with a small gift (a Dollar Store special) for Mom. We set up a schedule, and a group of Mother's Day elves joined me to assist students with picking out and wrapping these small tokens and then decorating a card to give to Mom. The idea grew the next year to include Dad when our school calendar took us far enough into June to do so.

Within a couple of years, the program was putting a strain on us financially as we are small. My friend from the United Way picked up the ball and began doing a gift drive all over the county. She supported a number of organizations including our school making it much easier to accomplish this rather large task. Over the years, we have been blessed by many individual's generosity as well as those of businesses like Kohls and the local Ubid organization.

I would like to continue doing all three of these activities, and I'd like to start thinking about 2 other areas.

I have had the pleasure of working with a local poet which some of you may or may not know: BJ Ward. He comes to our school during the first month of the school year and works with our 7th graders, our poetry club members, our high school mentors, and presents a wonderful assembly for our 5th graders. His work is wonderful, but we don't promote it at the middle school because it really is for a more mature audience. However, this year, we have discovered another poet whose work is focused on a younger audience: Robert Kurkela. He is coming in January to do similar work with our students. He has a number of items for sale, and I was thinking it would be wonderful to purchase some of his books to give to some of our less fortunate children and have him sign them while visiting. He is not charging an appearance fee, and the items will be available for purchase by everyone (who can afford it.) I am attaching a copy of the order form in case anyone would like to sponsor a child or children with one of the items.

The other area came to me recently when I was sitting with a number of our kids chatting and working on school work after the school day was long over. Today, I did not leave school until almost 7pm. I still had 3 students sitting with me. They don't go home until I do. Why? Their parents who are loving and responsible parents work very long hours to make ends meet. My one little angel's mom only has Sunday off, and on the other days, she doesn't get home until after 7. My little angel doesn't like to go home to an empty house. In chatting, the topic of miniature golf came up, and these children had no clue what it was. I was

reminded of a gentleman a number of years ago who called me up and asked to take 5 children to a play. We did, and it was a fabulous time for these youngsters who had never done anything quite like that. So where am I going with all of this? I was thinking that it might be nice to take a few of these children out to do some things that Mom and Dad haven't done or can't do such as bowling or maybe even a trip to NYC. Some have never been outside of the area. Maybe some have never been on a train. There you have it- the possibilities are endless.

I have begun a separate checking account to place money into for these purposes. This was really due to the outpouring of generosity we experienced this year. Thank you for that wonderful problem!!!

As so often my husband must endure after one of these events, I am already planning in my head for next year and hoping that we will be able to do something comparable. We have a situation with respect to the wrapping portion of our event. With the increase in number, Dunkin Donuts is simply not big enough to accommodate the children and elves. The Buffet was wonderful, but I know they will not give us the same deal next year as they did this year so we must brain storm other possibilities. Lorna and I are all over it! We have come up with several possibilities which I would like to share with you all in hopes that you might be of some assistance.

- 1) Negotiate with Walmart to have a pizza picnic somewhere on/in their premises.
- 2) Approach Mama's for a similar situation to the Buffet this year.
- 3) Change the time to a Saturday Morning just before Christmas and have a breakfast with Santa at the Church Community Center following the shopping event.

Problems which need solutions:

Transportation- Bussing is expensive. We would really need a bus in order to accomplish plan #2 or #3.

Typically, a big portion of the buss cost is the cost of the driver. Lorna suggested maybe someone would/could donate their time. Sounds great, but we would have to find a willing driver who then would be a liaison and negotiate with his or her own company about the remaining cost.

So we leave these ideas with you all as you may know of other resources we do not. If you have any suggestions or know someone you think might help, please contact me.

The last bit of information I would like to share is in response to a request from one of our sponsors about supporting local businesses. I want to assure you that I try really hard to do this. Over the years, it is much easier to do this with the Mother's Day and Father's Day Boutiques. Often, I am able to go out and purchase items. One year I purchased 20 \$5.00 gift certificates from Brian's Market. That is one example of many so I am trying to remember all the businesses we have patronized over the years. I am sure I will leave some out, but it will give you an idea that we do try.

Brian's Market, Kohls, Dunkin Donuts, The Buffet, MacDonalds, Hot Bagels Abroad, Quick Check, What in the World, Business Direct (when it was in business), Marshals, Leo's Luncheonette, Book Loft (when it was in business), The small party store by AT& T (when it was in business), The Dollar Tree, The Small Dollar Store by Ihop, Shop Rite, Weiss, A& P, Target, I think we did Dairy Queen to at one point. So I'm sure I left someone out, but we do try to get around to lots of businesses- Oh Harpers too!

I tried to address all the questions and concerns about our efforts, and I hope

you all had a wonderful holiday and a blessed 2012. I am also attaching a couple of pictures from the event. Hope you enjoy them.

Thank you all and May God bless you all,

Deanna Craig





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We accept cash, checks and money orders
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Robert Kurkela

**If you would like to sponsor a child or children for the items listed above. Please indicate items below and the the quantity. Please send it to Deanna Craig
PO Box 34
Vienna, NJ 07880**

Item	Quantity
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Total enclosed: _____

School
Days