



Fairhaven

Neighborhood News

A FREE! publication of all things Fairhaven
Including event listings from Cape Cod to RI



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with a big voice!*

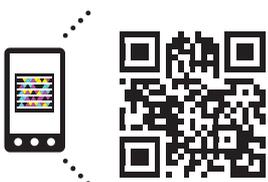
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Teeming with information you need.
(And some you don't need, but will be glad you have anyway.)

Monday Morning Fun teaches about sea critters



Erika Fernandes (right) hands over a spider crab to Ayla Silva while her brother, Avery Silva, watches during the Fairhaven Visitors Center Monday Morning Fun event on 8/17. An outreach educator with the Lloyd Center for the Environment, Ms. Fernandes had a variety of sea critters for children to see and hold. The visitors center has only one more Monday program scheduled, for next week, 8/24. See page 12 for story. *Photo by Beth David.*



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Gifts to Give in Acushnet is repurposing philanthropy

By Beth David
Editor

Jim Stevens had a crazy idea: That philanthropy didn't have to cost a fortune. In his world, philanthropy should have tangible results, aka "Tangible Philanthropy"; it should engage people of all ages and inspire them to give more, aka "Big Citizenship"; volunteers should give freely, and not be paid; no state money or grants should be accepted, it should all come from the community; and it should pay for itself.

A tall order indeed.

But he's getting there.

Gifts to Give, now located in the old Titleist building in Acushnet, is a model of giving and giving back that centers around children, not just giving to children, but asking children to give as well.

More than 12,000 children from 158 schools have volunteered at Gifts to Give in the past year, along with 4,000 adults. The organization has given away thousands and thousands of backpacks filled with school supplies, clothes, toys and books to thousands of children in the area.

And for each of the five years they've been operating, it has cost them less and less to operate. Yes, that would be less, not more.

It's all part of the model.

The move to the old golf ball plant double their space and lowered their cost, although it cost a lot of money to get the building up to code at the beginning.

"It was designed to manufacture golf balls," said Mr. Stevens. "Not to make better citizens."

They receive about 20,000 pounds of donations each week.

"We get the most amazing things," said Mr. Stevens. "And the most unbelievable crap."

Even most of the crap gets reused or recycled somehow. He said about

75% of the donations are suitable to be given to children.

"Giving stuff to children is the least most important thing we do," said Mr. Stevens.

He said getting the children volunteers in to help is the thing that will change the world.

It's tangible philanthropy with big citizenship.

There are 38 adult volunteers who work (for free) every week. There are at least that many out in the community who donate in-kind services. There are hundreds of children who donate time.

Gifts to Give does not give out randomly to groups or individuals. They are affiliated with local social service organizations that "shop" on the Gifts to Give website and make requests for specific children. The children are in foster care, or are being seen at any number of social service agencies in the area.

This time of year, school supplies are the big push. The organization will fill thousands of backpacks with school supplies and donate them to agencies that will deliver them to children in local school systems.

Called the "Stuff the Bus," the campaign will continue through August 30.

Another initiative of the organization is an early literacy program.

"Thirty million fewer words are heard by poor children entering preschool," said Mr. Stevens. "Vocabulary is a predictor of literacy, and literacy is a predictor of school success. With 30 million fewer words, they're already at a big disadvantage."

So, instead of just giving books to children, which Gifts to Give most certainly does, volunteers actually go to classrooms and read out loud to students.

"My big secret," said Mr. Stevens, "Is making it easy for people to connect."

The new space is 60,000 square feet and at any given moment has volunteers of all ages sorting, folding, stacking, cleaning.

There's a "toy hospital," where a retired judge volunteers every week to repair toys.



ABOVE: These backpacks will be filled with school supplies and given to needy students by Gifts to Give in Acushnet. BELOW: All toys are cleaned by volunteers before they are given away. Gifts to Give uses five gallons of Simple Green each week. Photos by Beth David.

There's a toy cleaning station, where every single toy is cleaned before being given away.

There are washers and dryers to clean stuffed animals. Most places will not take stuffed animals, explained tour guide Bob Cormier. Clothes include prom dresses, to borrow or to keep.

Michelle, 14, was volunteering through her church group. She said it was a nice way to make friends, and interact with people.

"It opens your comfort zone," she said. "And helps you make sure you're on the right track in your life."

Melisa Aviles said she works at Trinity Day Academy, an alternative school in New Bedford. She sang the praises of Gifts to Give for completely stocking a new library that the school just created. She said they emptied out a classroom that was not being used, painted it, and took 300 books from Gifts to Give.

Ms. Aviles also volunteers at Gifts to Give with her students.

Artist Meg Roberts was working on the entrance way, with a yellow brick road and lots of colors.

"I'm having fun," said Ms. Roberts, who was donating her time, of course. "We want to make it fun. There are lots of people helping, and lots of kids helping."

To donate to Gifts to Give, visit them at Titleist Drive (off Slocum Street) Acushnet, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Wednesday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The thrift shop is open on Saturdays only. Get a tour on Saturday, anytime.

For more information, visit www.giftstogive.org. To see their wish list, visit <http://www.giftstogive.org/what-we-accept/what-we-need/>

