

Blind Date with a Book program raises funds for fire victims

By Vera Kochan



Blind Date books ready for purchase at the checkout counter.

Photo Vera Kochan

As a way to help raise money for fire victims, Orinda Books owner Maria Roden is capitalizing

on a unique idea: her Blind Date with a Book program. Book stores typically receive a free copy of a

new book given by a publisher, for promotional purposes, to booksellers before the book is printed for mass distribution. Roden said, "I get so many books for free and am not allowed to sell them, so I decided to give them away to various causes on a regular basis."

The Blind Date with a Book program utilizes these books, which are wrapped in plain paper. Roden writes just a hint of what the book is about on the front. The books range in topic and are fiction or non-fiction. There's even a category for kids denoting a suitable age range included with the short synopsis.

The suggested cash donation is \$5, but Roden said, "We'll take any amount. I just set out the basket of books on Thursday (Nov. 15), and

already we've taken in over \$700! One person wrote a check for \$300. I can't fill the basket fast enough. It's been amazing!"

When asked how long the fire relief promotion is expected to last, Roden foresees it going to the end of the year. And it doesn't stop there. Orinda Books is generously matching all donations dollar for dollar. "Every month we 'Blind Date' for a new cause, but this a very urgent one."

Orinda Books has consistently given away books to various causes over the years. They've sponsored an author school visit, providing 130 books, donated books to local Title 1 low-income schools, and participated in the Reach Out and Read program, which underscores how reading aloud promotes lan-

guage development and early literacy skills.

All money collected from the Blind Date with a Book program will be sent to Global Giving, which in turn forwards the donations to The California Wildfire Relief Fund. Global's website says, "This fund will provide relief to people impacted by the fires in the form of emergency supplies like food, water, and medicine, in addition to long-term recovery assistance to help residents recover and rebuild." To donate directly visit www.globalgiving.org.

To support Blind Date with a Book, stop by Orinda Books, 276 Village Square, Orinda, visit their website: www.orindabooks.com, or call (925) 254-7606 for more details.

Boy Scouts Providing Fuel for Life



Photo provided

Orinda Boy Scouts Troop 237, from the Orinda chapter of Grateful Gatherings, helped lift a family out of darkness and into the light. In one day, hard-working Scouts and families were able to furnish a home for a single dad and his four children recently transitioning out of homelessness. This family has never had a home to feel comfortable or safe. Now they don't have to sleep on broken beds and can have a family dinner together at one table. The only girl with four

boys in the home, the 11-year old daughter sobbed when she saw her room fit for a teen girl. As the family hugged, the eldest son said, "Thank you, this is going to give us fuel!" Troop 237 thanks Oakland-based, nonprofit organization Grateful Gatherings (gratefulgatherings.org) and the support of the community and troop families for allowing them the opportunity to give this family a new start.

Village Associates helps families keep Thanksgiving traditions alive

Submitted by Brent Bamberger



Photo provided

Village Associates, an independent real estate brokerage firm in Orinda, continued its Thanksgiving tradition of helping families in need with children at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, Oakland by preparing and providing over 75 meals, supplies and support.

When a child is admitted at Children's Hospital Oakland, many of these families live in temporary housing close to the hospital. In conjunction with Social Services,

Village Associates and its 30 agents, bought, organized and presented baskets of meals and supplies for families on Nov. 14.

Organizers said the feeling of home is not something every family gets this time of year. "This is our 14th year of supporting families who are dealing with extenuating medical circumstances. It's our way of making the holiday feel more personal and special for them."

The Peter Pan Foundation continues quest to help others

Submitted by Gina Campo



Who are these selfless superstars? The kids and teens of The Peter Pan Foundation in Lafayette.

Photo provided

The Peter Pan Foundation started as an organization that inspired children of all ages to be creative and give back while pro-

ducing several big stage musicals a year. Since adding a performance troupe and partnering with local charitable organizations, PPF is

now involved in non-stop community service. Any given month, they will be performing at an average of 8-10 events, as varied as St. Baldrick's Brave the Shave at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland, participating in the Dance for Kindness event, to helping at local food banks.

"Doing community service activities with the PPF teaches kids and teens what can't be taught in any classroom," explained Juliette Benazra, a senior at Acalanes High School and president of the PPF teen leadership council, Bay Area Magic Makers. "We are able to realize the significance of kindness, empathy and our ability to make a difference in our community and on a larger scale."

PPF has participated in about 30 events so far this year for both The Make-A-Wish Foundation and Easter Seals Bay Area and is thrilled to be joining forces with the Born This Way Foundation in 2019.

This Veterans Day, the troupe

performed their annual abridged version of their signature musical "Wish Upon A Star" at Children's Hospital. This was the PPF's 12th time bringing this magical show to the hospital and the performance concluded with a donation of \$15,000 and more than 150 Play-Station video games. With this recent donation, the PPF has donated more than \$200,000 to the hospital over the past 10 years.

In addition to the audience that day, patients at the hospital throughout the year will get to enjoy the show through the weekly showing through the hospital's closed circuit TV system.

"Performing at Children's Hospital Oakland was an extremely impactful experience because we were able to bring our show to the kids who can't come to us," said PPF performer Alex Young.

"These events are instilling a sense of self, as well as a desire to be selfless," explained Leslie Noel, founder and artistic director for the PPF. "Our participants see first-

hand how capable they are – how capable we all are – of making positive changes in the world. PPF is providing a safe space for them to grow, feel confident that they have much to give others and then to use their gifts to spread love and light. It is a beautiful and humbling thing to be a part of."

Where the excitement never stops, the foundation is thrilled to be moving into their new home Jan. 1 on Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette that will serve as an inspiring environment for their teen leaders, philanthropists and children of all ages, enabling them to extend love and light to even more people in need. They will be performing a winter gala of holiday music with a silent auction to help raise funds to support the expenses of the new location and their ongoing philanthropy work. The public is invited to attend on Dec. 7 at the Lafayette Library. Ticket information can be found on their website, peterpan-foundation.org.

White Pony Express sends ready-to-eat meals and cash donations to Paradise fire victims

Submitted by Steve Spraitzar

Starting Nov. 14, White Pony Express, the 2018 California Nonprofit of the Year in California Senate District 7, commenced sending a refrigerated truck daily with perishable ready-to-eat food and envelopes with donated cash to aid the fire victims in the Paradise area. WPE intends to continue making these runs until there is no longer an acute need for area fire victims.

WPE volunteers Jim May and Eric Cox drove a refrigerated van with food and donations to a little-

known town called Brownsville Nov. 14 where the manager, Kathleen, has been putting up about 50 evacuees in her small motel. "She fixes food for them in the morning and the townspeople do it in the evening," May said. "The ready-to-eat sandwiches and salads that White Pony Express brought were enough to provide them with lunches for several days. In Brownsville, we handed out envelopes of money, which is desperately needed for necessities."

The ready-to-eat meals are

from the regular donations made daily to WPE's Food Rescue program. These donations have been providing a substantial amount of food that is distributed by WPE to the hungry in Contra Costa County.

"Going on to Oroville, we found people camped out in parking lots," May continued. "Fortunately, we were able to provide food to all of those who needed it. It was a wonderful experience to be a part of this."

These food and cash donation trips to the impacted areas are be-

ing carried out by WPE's Food Rescue Program staff and volunteers. The Food Rescue Program picks up quality surplus food each day from supermarkets, restaurants, and farmers' markets and then sorts and delivers that food to shelters, churches and other facilities that feed the hungry in our communities. All of this is done free of charge. In five years, WPE has rescued more than 7.5 million pounds (equivalent to about 6.3 million meals) of fresh, nutritious food that would otherwise go to

waste.

Says WPE Executive Director Gary Conner, "Although we principally serve Contra Costa County, White Pony Express is most grateful to be able to send needed food to the families in the Paradise area, who are now coping with survival in the aftermath of the fires. It is important that we remember and help serve our brothers and sisters in Paradise, many of whom have lost everything."