

## Making good use of the leftovers

‘Rock and Wrap It Up!’ feeds a need

by ANN E. FRIEDMAN



PHOTO: The Lawrence Middle School Honor Society load a truck donated by De Setta Nursery to transport 1,500 gifts collected by Cedarhurst resident Syd Mandelbaum’s “Rock and Wrap It Up!” organization to the Methodist Church of Woodmere’s Outreach Program in Far Rockaway and the First Congregation Church of Rockaway.

Courtesy Syd Mandelbaum

When Cedarhurst resident Syd Mandelbaum was given backstage access to the uneaten food at a Jones Beach show in 1990 by veteran promoter Ron Delsener, it dawned on Mandelbaum that leftovers from similar venues across the nation could help feed the poor.

“Poverty has not been reduced by the government or agencies, so thinking outside a much bigger box had to be done,” Mandelbaum said.

A year later, Mandelbaum launched “Rock and Wrap It Up!” that collects the excess food, paper products and toiletries that concerts, sports teams, television and movie sets, hotels and schools generate and donates to charitable organization and food pantries.

In 1997, the Rock and Wrap It Up! school program launched in order to teach children not to throw their food away. Rose Foley, the National School Program Director for Rock and Wrap It Up!, became involved with the organization in 2003 after her daughter came across a Rock and Wrap It Up! booth at Jones Beach.

In the Five Towns, the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway and the Hewlett-Woodmere and Lawrence school districts are involved in the Snack Wrap! program where students donate their unopened snacks. The schools can either keep the snacks and distribute them at after school programs or donate them to their local food pantry.

“It’s important to teach kids while they’re young so by the time they’re adults, it will be a sin to throw away food,” Foley said. “Hopefully we’re building little soldiers to stop hunger.”

Since Rock and Wrap It Up! started, they’ve partnered with NBC Universal, HBO, the National Hockey League and every sports team in New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to donate the unsold concession food to local agencies. They are currently working on getting every NBA team onboard.

Abby Kaish, the Sports Wrap! coordinator for Rock and Wrap It Up!, volunteers out of his Long Beach home and coordinates the pick-up of food from sports games. Kaish first became involved with Rock and Wrap It Up! six years ago when a friend of his was working with Mandelbaum and told him about his mission to reduce poverty.

“Nationally, I coordinate the pick-up with a local charity where the teams are based and see it through until the pick-up is made,” Kaish said. “In the New York area, I sometimes pick up the food and bring it to charities. The most rewarding thing is bringing the food to the place where it’s needed.”

Rock and Wrap It Up! also partnered with hotels such as the Grand Hyatt, Hyatt-Regency, Langham Hotels, Marriott, Ritz-Carlton and Sheraton after Mandelbaum learned that hotels throw out uneaten food, unused toiletries, toilet paper and tissues.

“Keeping food out of the landfill is the best thing we can do,” Mandelbaum said. “Nothing should go into the landfills when there are hungry people in our cities.”

Mandelbaum said he tries out all of his ideas in the Five Towns and Nassau County before launching them globally. He also said the need for volunteers will never diminish.

“The worst thing is that there’s a need for Rock and Wrap It Up!,” Mandelbaum said. “We certainly have our jobs cut out for us.”

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