



PHOTO BY HILARY SCHWAB

Jeremy Lichtenstein

Kids in Need Distributors

Montgomery County is one of the nation's most affluent counties, yet thousands of school kids don't get enough to eat each day. In fact, of the approximately 151,000 students enrolled in MoCo public schools, about one-third receive free or reduced-price lunch.

That fact may surprise you, but it shocked Jeremy Lichtenstein who decided to do something about it. "My mind was completely boggled by that fact," he says.

A successful real estate agent for Remax Realty Services in Bethesda, Lichtenstein made the connection that kids who can't afford meals in school may not have enough to eat at home. So he started Kids in Need Distributors to deliver groceries to schools that in turn send them home with needy kids. From a modest beginning in January of 2012 of serving one elementary and a few students, KIND now has 30 volunteers who deliver weekend food supplies to 15 elementary schools and three middle schools where more than 1,000 students take home a backpack of non-perishable goodies every weekend. That translates into approximately 65,000 meals and a lot of happy kids.

The schools are spread from Damascus to Silver Spring, and include traditional high-income areas like Chevy Chase and Bethesda. "They feel special that someone is looking out for them and that someone else cares about them," he says.

Working with Costco in Wheaton Plaza, Lichtenstein places an order every six weeks, typically for items like tuna fish, juice boxes, oatmeal, breakfast and granola bars, popcorn, cereal, fruit cups, raisins and Ramen noodles.

Costco fills the order and places it on pallets by school on the loading dock where KIND volunteers use their personal vehicles to deliver the food. Based on input from principals, counselors and teachers, the schools help determine which students go home with heavier backpacks on their shoulders or a grocery bag in their hands.

By the 2014-15 school year, Lichtenstein hopes KIND will reach 21 or 22 schools and provide assistance to nearly 1,300 students. KIND also recently implemented a reading program at one elementary school where test scores had dropped below county averages. Students are given incentives to read 10 books and write a paragraph about each one. Not surprisingly, that program has been a hit as well.

How You Can Help: Kids In Need Distributors • 6917 Arlington Road, Suite 302, Bethesda, MD 20814 • 301.347.4121 • kindinmd.org