



Restaurant voucher program will benefit families in need

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



Local nurses show off the Nurse Purse. SUBMITTED

Teens help healthcare heroes with Nurse Purse

Aimée La Fountain

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When Ridgewood High School junior Ani Martirosian heard about the strain nurses on the frontlines are under, she and her friend Isabella Benaour started brainstorming ways they could help.

"After seeing nurses through social media working over 48-hour shifts saving lives during the pandemic, we knew that they were right in our backyard since New Jersey was hit so bad," Martirosian said. "We both personally know so many people who work in the medical industry, so we'd hear many stories of what their dedication was like and really wanted to do something to show our appreciation."

When considering what they could do, the two tapped into what they knew. "We always had a passion for beauty and skincare and when we'd see the pictures of all the nurses whose faces were hurt by the masks and all the hours of work, we wanted to create a bag of products that would help them," Martirosian said.

They filled a portable pouch with essentials such as face masks, hand lotion and lip balm, and coined it the Nurse Purse.

"These nurses barely had any time for themselves with the long shifts, so we wanted to make it easy for them to treat themselves, too," Martirosian said. "We truly just wanted to see smiles on the nurses' faces and as they were helping others, we wanted to help them, too."

They were mindful to purchase American made items from local small businesses whenever possible in order to further their impact on the community.

"When we were researching our favorite brands, we realized there were many local businesses that made these amazing products," Martirosian said. "We realized that these small businesses were also hit very hard during this pandemic and decided if we could help them by giving back to the nurses, it'd be the best of both worlds."

Martirosian and Benaour raised over \$3,500 for the program. "It was amazing to see how many generous people wanted to help and supported us in covering the cost of the bag and products in it," Martirosian said.

tirossian said. "There were also kind businesses who donated products because they themselves wanted to give back."

So far, Martirosian and Benaour have hand-stuffed 500 purses, which went to nurses at Valley Hospital, Holy Name Medical Center, Englewood Hospital and Hackensack Hospital.

The ICU nurses at Holy Name were thrilled to receive them, according to Bridget Grant, administrative assistant at Holy Name Medical Foundation. "They started calling other nurses in the ward over to make sure that everyone in their station received the donation," she said.

"Seeing how happy we made those nurses holding our bags and knowing they'll use those products to make themselves feel better was an incredible feeling," Martirosian said. "We'll never forget this experience."

Holy Name distributed the purses to nurses and also placed them in the hospital's Zen Den, where the staff can go to catch their breath. Grant said, "It was a generous donation and very well-

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Reopening of indoor dining postponed, most likely for weeks

Terrence T. McDonald

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Indoor dining in New Jersey did not come back Thursday after all, a major blow to an industry that has struggled to survive since the coronavirus outbreak began in March.

Gov. Phil Murphy said Monday that after seeing a spike in coronavirus cases in states that have reopened indoor dining, he is postponing its return indefinitely. Murphy said he does not anticipate allowing restaurants to reopen indoor dining for weeks.

"It brings me no joy to do this, but we have no choice," he said.

In recent days, bars in California, Florida and Texas that had already reopened were forced to close again because of a surge in cases.

Murphy also noted that at some New Jersey restaurants, which were allowed to serve meals outdoors starting on June 16, he has seen overcrowding and patrons not using face coverings.

"The carelessness of one establishment can completely undo the good work of many others," he said.

Last week, seven states — Arizona, Arkansas, California, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas — reported new highs for coronavirus hospitalizations, according to the Washington Post.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Sunday ordered bars in Los Angeles and other areas to close because of the rising spread of the coronavirus in that state. Newsom had allowed them to reopen three weeks ago.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott last Friday shut bars entirely and scaled back restaurant capacity as a response to a coronavirus surge in that state.

Murphy said public health is more at risk because of people gathered at bars than seated inside restaurants. When the state gives the green light for indoor dining, he said, bars will be expected to keep congregating at a minimum.

"The bar is there exclusively to serve drinks to people who are seated at a table," he said. "It's not there to congregate."



Waiter Vedat Yazar serves customers outdoors at Vesta Wood-Fired Pizza in East Rutherford. Outdoor seating will remain the only option for now. MITSU.YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

Nurse Purse

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received.” She added that they’re so grateful for the thoughtful gifts they’ve received to help lift staff members’ spirits.

Martirossian said the project taught them lessons in how the business world works and finding creative ways to achieve goals. She encouraged her peers who are also looking to help out to do so, even if it seems daunting. “If you have an idea and you want to bring it to life, do it,” Martirossian said. “Nobody’s ever too young or too anything to get it done.”

Martirossian and Benaour continue to receive purse requests and are looking into ways to continue their efforts to donate more. “We realized first-hand for the first time how truly incredibly rewarding it is to help someone else just because you know they deserve it,” Martirossian said. “This will definitely be the first of many times we pay more attention to who we can help that needs support.”

For more on the Nurse Purse program, visit @the_NursePurse on Instagram. To support the project, visit their GoFundMe page at <https://gf.me/u/x5ujn>