



Edwin And Wanda Achenbach cut fabric for masks. Submitted by Tina Rowan



(Left) Kami Kessler and Heather Wolstenholme share a message of community support. Submitted by Heather Wolstenholme



Melissa Prestipino makes one of her first dinner donation drop-offs. Submitted by Melissa Prestipino

# SPARTA HELPS HEALTHCARE HEROES: Champions of Community Caring

By Teresa Sellinger

If our Sparta community were to be measured today by the actions of Sparta Helps Healthcare Heroes (SHHH) leaders, members and everyone in our community who have contributed to COVID-19 crisis efforts through their organization, our greatness would most certainly be deemed unparalleled. This incredible group, headed by tireless founder Melissa Prestipino, not only surpassed expectations of what a small, dedicated group of community members could do in a short time frame under unprecedented government mandates, but also attracted positive national attention on Sparta in the process.

When *Sparta Living* profiled SHHH in last month's issue, their effort was young, but building momentum at a rapid pace. Melissa had founded SHHH after being furloughed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis from her position as a licensed physical therapist at Therapeutics Unlimited, and had decided to channel her energy toward helping our community by raising money and collecting much-needed supplies for local healthcare providers. She started picking up and delivering supplies on her own, but as requests for personal protective equipment, meals and snacks began pouring in, she realized she needed a team. Enter five more champions of community caring:

**Joanna Beach**, SHHH administrator, who set up the SHHH Facebook page for which she approves submitted posts and creates posts spotlighting businesses who give monetary donations and meals. She also assists



Logo design by Alex Chiong, AKA Spartacurse Design

with oversight of the sewing committee for masks, headbands and caps.

**Nicole Chiong**, the key player in helping to chart the healthcare providers' requests to help them get fulfilled, including snacks and drinks. She also helped with logo design and label printing along with her husband, Alex, a graphic designer.

**Erica Hertzberg**, who handles SHHH technological aspects such as setting up new online accounts and emails, and orchestrating weekly leadership team virtual meetings.

**Kristin List**, head of the food committee, who set up the SHHH website and healthcare provider request entry form, oversees solicitation of food sponsorships and donations and is in charge of delegating and ordering food for medical facilities.

**LeeAnne Pitzer**, the mastermind of the Amazon Wishlist which she based on most commonly requested items. She helps organize and purchase key items from the wishlist, connects contacts and makes PPE purchases.

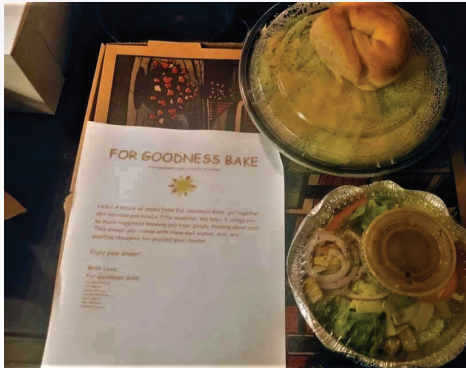
Melissa and her core leadership team officially launched SHHH March 28 on Facebook. An official SHHH website, Amazon Wishlist and GoFundMe page followed, with PayPal eventually replacing GoFundMe for monetary donations.

Sparta residents and businesses responded immediately, flooding SHHH with offers to make masks, sew gowns, create face shields, crochet

headbands, lead free virtual yoga classes, teach free virtual art classes, sell lawn signs and more. Stitch Adventure donated supplies for almost 900 masks, fabric headbands and headband kits; worked with Innovative Laser Creations in



Emma Hemsworth works on masks for SHHH at Stitch Adventure. Submitted by Emma Hemsworth



A For Goodness Bake dinner delivery to a SHHH member home. Submitted by Jaime Lynn Ricciardi Chervony

Ogdensburg to have custom buttons made for the kits; and partnered with SHHH to distribute masks and headbands.

“Getting to be part of such a large endeavor centered around the need for quilters, knitters, crocheters and sewists fits right into our mission,” say Eric and Anna Hemsworth, owners of Stitch Adventure. “We’re so glad we’ve been here and are able to help.”

Sparta group For Goodness Bake purchased and delivered meals to hardworking SHHH team member families.

“We decided we wanted to honor the SHHH group because they are working so hard for others right now,” Jaime Chervony, founder, explains.

Local restaurants including Jersey Mikes, Tanti Baci, Anthony Francos, Uncle Sal's Pizza, Casa Capri, Andre's Restaurant, Sheridan's, Eric's Deli, Lake House Cafe, Il Porto, Bagel Station, Casa Mia, Homestead Restaurant and Homer's Restaurant jumped into the SHHH effort, catering meals for hungry healthcare professionals. In fact, Homer's Restaurant alone donated 220 Easter meals to Saint Clare's Hospitals in Dover and Denville.

As requests and offers continued to pour in, SHHH added additional key team members to help shoulder the load:

**Lorraine Bellush**, who tracks all expenses and assists with money management to make purchases such as Amazon Wishlist, food catering and PPE.

**Maria DeAquino** on the food committee. Maria helps in calling local businesses to cater meals to medical facilities, planning the meal delivery calendar and networking with local restaurants.

**Doris Friesen**, who set up the initial food committee and transports needed items.

**Lorri Martin**, head of the sewing committee. Lorri distributes directions for sewing masks, headbands and surgical caps and oversees drop-off/pick-up points for materials.

**Annemarie Weisbeck**, who organized the online list of volunteers to make food deliveries from restaurants to medical centers, police

“The greatness of a **community** is most accurately measured by the **compassionate** actions of its **members.**”  
-Coretta Scott King



With the crew of ABC Nightline taping them, Melissa Prestipino and Seth Kovach pack donations for transport to Andover Subacute. Photo by Alex Chiong

departments, fire departments, and ambulance buildings and helped with the food committee.

SHHH efforts gained national attention when ABC's *Nightline* covered an SHHH “big pack day” for Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center II. On big pack days, SHHH members sort local donations and SHHH-purchased items based on healthcare professional requests and deliver them to healthcare centers.

“We pretty much clear out the majority of our

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Jen Randina, owner of Leave a Little Sparkle Boutique, holds one of the SpartaStrong shirts she created as thank-you gifts for SHHH members. Submitted by Jen Randina



One of the shirts being sold through the SHHH website to benefit SHHH. Courtesy of Melissa Prestipino

inventory during these packs,” Erica explains. “Every week we think it’s going to be a smaller pack because we’re starting from square one, but this community rallies and every week it gets bigger and bigger! It’s truly amazing!”

As of April 23, the

SHHH Facebook group has grown to 2,227 members, 1000 homemade masks were donated through SHHH members and \$35,000 has been raised which went towards the purchase of masks, face shields, gowns, mask headbands, sanitizer and flip flops for healthcare professionals.

“It took only 27 days to get to that amazing point,” Melissa says. “And we can’t calculate the amount that our community and friends/family purchased through our SHHH Amazon Wishlist because there is no way to track, but it’s definitely been more than the \$2300 SHHH has spent personally. What came of this is nothing short of amazing and a testament to the fact that so many people care about others.”

“This virus is far from over, and we want to continue to help the people that need it most!” Erica says.

With the compassionate champions of SHHH leading the way, our Sparta community will most certainly continue to do just that, growing in greatness one mask at a time.

To learn more about SHHH, donate funds through PayPal, locate the Amazon Wishlist, find the Facebook page link or purchase SHHH t-shirts and tanks, visit [www.spartahelps.org](http://www.spartahelps.org).



(Left) Instructor Beth Varkala leads an Art from the Heart virtual class, teaching children to create encouraging artwork for healthcare professionals. Submitted by Beth Varkala

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