

READING, WRITING AND REACHING OUT

By Teresa Sellinger

Sparta families encountered the new world of distance learning this spring following the closing of schools. Students, parents, teachers and administrators met the challenge together, supporting each other and our community simultaneously.

Sparta High School students Bhavika Dawar and Jamie Rubin raised over \$7000 to date through their Feeding Sussex County COVID-19 GoFundMe fundraiser, using the funds to purchase and donate food and supplies to the Sparta Ecumenical Food Pantry.

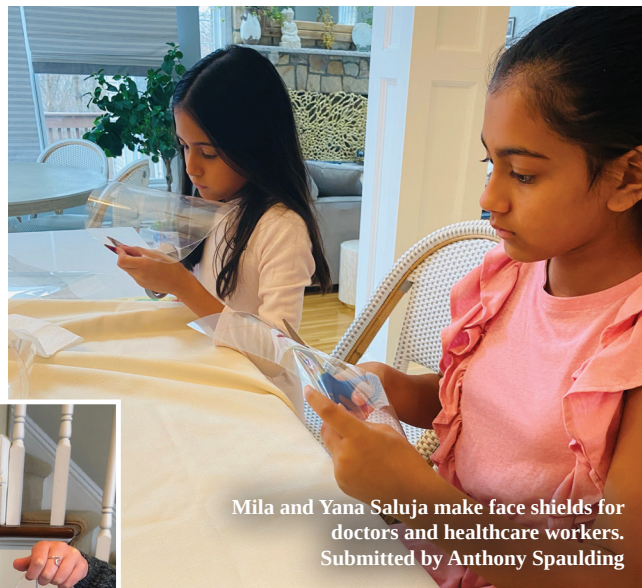
"It has been super exciting seeing our fundraiser grow because we hadn't expected to raise nearly this much money," Jamie says. "It's a huge relief knowing that people in our community are being helped."

Mohawk Avenue School continued its Mohawk Avenue School Makes a Difference effort in partnership with Sparta Helps Healthcare Heroes to create, collect and distribute cards and posters carrying messages of support to medical staff.

Helen Morgan student Avery Tauber sewed and donated masks to Newton Medical Center, the UC San Diego Hospital neonatal intensive care unit, local delis, local bakeries, friends and family members.

Sparta High School teachers, led by Spanish teacher Amanda Sachenski, created a collage message of support for their students with each person holding a decorated page or selfie offering a word in the message "Dear Sparta students, We miss you all so much. You are amazing. Keep up the great work! Dream big. Smile often and stay Spartan strong."

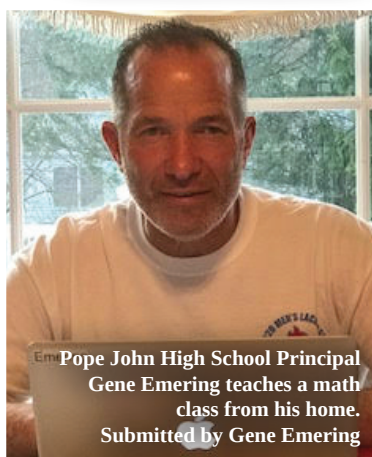
Sparta High School Athletic Director Steven Stoner came up with the idea of illuminating Cassels Field for 20 minutes on April 20 at 20:20 (8:20pm) to celebrate the class of 2020. After reaching out to district-level administration and organizing the event, he elicited the assistance of Assistant Superintendent Mr. McQueeney to broadcast the celebration via Facebook Live. Prior to



Mila and Yana Saluja make face shields for doctors and healthcare workers.
Submitted by Anthony Spaulding



Avery Tauber proudly displays masks she's sewn for healthcare workers.
Submitted by Kimberly Tauber



Pope John High School Principal Gene Emering teaches a math class from his home.
Submitted by Gene Emering

the lighting, students received this message written by Sparta High School Librarian/Media Specialist Angela De Luccia: "Spartans, our vision is 20/20- We know how difficult the current situation can be for all of us. To celebrate Spartan Spirit, Spartan Pride, the Class of 2020, students, athletes, coaches, faculty, staff, and fans- we will illuminate Cassels Field on April 20th at 20:20 (8:20 PM) for 20 minutes as a tribute to all Spartans!"

Superintendent of Sparta Public Schools Dr. Michael A. Rossi, Jr. says, "I am humbled by the dedication, commitment and overall effort of our learning community in rising to meet these challenging times."

The Catholic Academy of Sussex County also tackled virtual learning while taking time to give back to the community.

"Considering we had never done anything like this before Monday, March 16, I am so impressed with our teachers, students and parents," Pope John Director of Curriculum Brian Vohden says. "There's no doubt our schools set high expectations for our students, but they always seem to rise to the occasion."

In addition to academic efforts, the three Academy schools, Reverend Brown, Pope John Middle School and Pope John High School, teamed up with Troop 150 in Sparta to run two food drives benefitting the Sussex County Food Pantry.







Megan O'Keeffe
photography

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Pope John High School also lent its 3D printers to a face shield-making effort spearheaded by Pope John Robotics Team members Kevin Nolan, Ryan Rodrigues and Anika Rodrigues. Ryan and Anika's mother, Newton Medical Center Chief of Radiology Vanitha Rodrigues, explains, "I told them robotics teams all over the country were using their energy to help their medical family and healthcare workers. They said that they wanted to do that on a local level to help our local community."



Jamie Rubin and Bhavika Dawar proudly display \$1222 worth of items for the Sparta Ecumenical Food Pantry purchased through their fundraiser. Submitted by Jamie Rubin

The collaborative effort grew to include assistance from the Sparta Public Library, Sparta High School student Connor Snellings, Ogdensburg School parent Stephen Gough, local physicians and their family members and additional Pope John parents and students.

(Right)Sparta High School teachers share a group message of support for students. Submitted by Amanda Sachenski

Also helping out local medical personnel were Pope John Middle School student Yana Saluja and Reverend Brown student Mila Saluja, who made face shields at home for healthcare workers.

Along with helping healthcare workers, the Academy schools teamed up with Troop 150 in Sparta, holding two food drives to collect items for donation to the Sussex County Food Pantry.

Individually, Pope John Middle School student Ryan Burton and his family helped make and donate 20 meals for homebound senior citizens. Reverend Brown student Kaelynn Muli created and delivered 80 notes, cards and messages to senior citizens in an assisted living facility. Pope John High School students Allie and Devin Sellinger launched Adventure Arrives, an effort involving collecting, quarantining, disinfecting and delivering free gently-used books and art supplies to Sparta families; and Pope John High School student Annya Wisinski made and donated 45 face masks to local groups on the frontlines of the pandemic.

So while our Sparta school community may at times feel the COVID-19 crisis is shrinking our lives to the confines of our homes, it's obvious that our hearts and minds continue to expand, to the benefit of all.



Sparta High School celebrates the class of 2020 by lighting the Cassels Field scoreboard. Photo by Steven Rendle

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