



Dermer Dreams: Fighting Hunger...One Bag at a Time

By LiliAnn Paras

“Many hands make light work” is on full display in Monmouth County, thanks to the vision and drive of the Dermer family of Fair Haven. Dan and Alyse Dermer grew up in Freehold, settled in Sea Bright (until Superstorm Sandy destroyed their home) relocated to New York, and now reside in Fair Haven with their daughter Reyna, son Brendan, and Schempie, their famous bernadoodle. A giving spirit is ingrained in the entire family and Dan is quick to credit his mother, Beatrice, with instilling in him and his brother Mike, a love for helping others. This desire to make a difference most recently culminated in the creation of Dermer Dreams, a non-profit organization focused on fighting hunger. With Dan and Alyse at the helm, Reyna and Brendan also play a large role in the Dermer Dreams charity, and even Schempie is on the scene greeting the students on collection day.

The inspiration for Dermer Dreams arose when Superstorm Sandy hit. Even though the storm devastated the Dermers personally, it also brought the plights of so many others into sharp focus, and the Dermers knew they had to act. They decided to focus on the extraordinary scope of hunger in the country and especially in our own area. The Dermer Dreams Neighborhood Captain Program was created, knowing they could not accomplish this alone. They were correct in believing that other people also had a desire to help, but often did not know where to begin. So, while living in New York City before settling in Fair Haven, the Der-

mers simplified the food donation process, organizing many volunteers to each do a small part by filling a bag of food for centralized distribution. The operation in New York City was a huge success over many years.

Shortly after moving to Fair Haven, Dan and Alyse brought their Dermer Dreams “One Bag at a Time” to their new local community. The concept sounds simple-- until the scale of the effort is realized. In 2019, the Fair Haven residents raised an impressive 24,633 pounds of food for Lunch Break. Fair Haven Mayor Lucarelli thanked Dermer Dreams with a Proclamation, and the group was also recognized that year by Move for Hunger as one of the top 10 food drives in New Jersey, and included in Lunch Break’s Circle of Hope. Dermer Dreams did not stop there. Three hundred students in Monmouth County, participating in the



Photo: Robert Samuels

Neighborhood Captain Program, collected a whopping 108,450 pounds of food that were distributed to twelve area food banks. Dan enthusiastically thanked the students, exclaiming, “We crushed our goals!”

What is the secret to such success? The food drive concept they developed is very straightforward, yet still leaves room for the students to be creative while earning community service hours. Each Neighborhood Captain receives 100 donation bags with flyers, and creates the best strategy to distribute the bags in their community. Some captains give three bags to 30 people they know, while others give them to 100 individual homes. Other captains have launched their own social media campaigns to increase their food collections. On collection day, all the bags are picked up and delivered to the Fair Haven firehouse, where they are sorted, weighed, boxed and loaded onto delivery trucks.

“The ultimate goal of the Dermer Dreams Neighborhood Captains is to solve hunger across our great state of New Jersey. More than 1,000,000 residents in New Jersey go hungry every day; 300,000 of them are children. We will change this,” Dan said, challenging each one of the students in Monmouth County to join the team that will help solve this problem. “The students are the ones who can take this platform across New Jersey to solve the hunger problem,” Dan noted. “I will personally make sure that every single bag of food that you deliver ends up on the plate of someone who is hungry. This is only the beginning of what we will accomplish together.”

The upcoming event on April 24 is your chance to join in and become one of the “many hands” helping to make the food drive “light work.”



Photo: Robert Samuels



The Dermer Family - from left: Reyna, Brendan, Alyse and Dan with Schempie, their famous bernadoodle (Photo: Lara Robby)

SAVE the DATE

Saturday, April 24

**Help Our Neighbors by
Joining the Next Food Drive**

SIGN UP NOW

You Can Help Meet the Goal to Sign Up
300 Students & Collect More Than 100,000
Pounds of Food.

The Neighborhood Captain Program

Open to all students in Monmouth County
Seeking Community Service

How it works:

1. The students sign up online.
2. Dermer Dreams delivers 100 bags and 100 flyers to the students two weeks before the Food Drive.
3. The students distribute the bags in their hometowns.
4. The students, (with a parent or someone 18 or older), pick up the donations on April 24 and deliver them to the Fair Haven Fire House located at 645 River Road.
5. Upon delivery, the students receive a certificate confirming they managed their own Dermer Dreams Food Drive and the hours earned.

To learn more and to sign up,
visit dermerdreams.org.