

Around Alamo: Women Party In-kindness to benefit others

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For Alamo's Melissa Smith and Shani Hall the Aesop quote, "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted," is more than just an inspiring quote for these friends.

Taken to heart, the words of wisdom helped mold their philanthropic endeavor, Party In-kindness (www.partyin-kindness.org), into a nonprofit organization with the idea of turning any occasion into an opportunity to help others in need.

"Party In-kindness stemmed from the thought that sometimes our small, everyday actions can make the biggest impact on another human being without even knowing it," said Smith, who experienced an act of kindness when her newborn daughter, Sophia, underwent surgery at just six days old and a stranger did something to lift Smith's spirits.

"Someone we did not know knit a lavender hat for her during her stay in the NICU, and she wore that beautiful hat throughout her recovery," shared Smith about the kind gesture. "The warmth of knowing a person could have that kind of selfless generosity touched my heart forever, and I knew one day I would pay it forward somehow," she added.

Hall was onboard immediately when Smith approached her with the concept of turning book clubs, bunco gatherings and parties small and large into a way of giving back.

"Melissa came to me with a charity idea in its infancy, and I loved the thought behind it! It wasn't before long that we partnered and turned that idea into Party In-kindness. We want to spread the message that even small acts of kindness can make a difference and show everyone how you can turn any occasion you are hosting or attending into a reason to give to others," said Hall, who wanted to contribute to something that would be meaningful to her family and also have an impact on community families in need.

Thus, the co-founders launched the organization a year-and-a-half ago as the friends set out to encourage other friends to give back to the community.

"We now work with individuals, groups or businesses and facilitate the giving component to turn their party into an event that gives back. We select charities based on what is meaningful to the host," said Smith. "We have given to various local charities, such as Shelter Inc., STAND! and Children's Hospital Oakland through Party In-kindness donations," added Hall.

From kids' birthday parties, to dinner parties among friends, their website features photos of various donations guests bring, such as toiletries for the Bay Area Crisis Nursery, basketball shorts for Foster a Dream, books for patients at Children's Hospital and items for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Salono Counties. Even this past Mother's Day, brunch was the perfect opportunity to gather donations for makeup bags and art supplies for women and children at the Elizabeth House in Oakland. All of which goes to show that any occasion to gather family and friends is the perfect time to also gather donations and pay it forward.

Party In-kindness co-hosted an Aug. 22 event at Diablo Country Club to help Kerry Maunus and April George, co-creators of Turkey on the Table, launch their book, which is a family activity that promotes gratitude by having participants write what they are thankful for on Thankful Feathers and add them to an adorable stuffed turkey in November.

The turkey, with accumulated feathers of gratitude, makes a wonderful centerpiece for Thanksgiving and ultimately teaches children to be grateful for what they have. Proceeds from the evening went to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. For more information about Turkey on the Table and to order one for family and friends in time for November and Thanksgiving, go to www.turkeyonthetable.com.

To learn more about Party In-kindness and how Smith and Hall can help you host a party that gives back, visit their website above and also click on Savvy Giving Gal for tips on Smith's informative blog about getting your family geared up to give back.

To pass on the concept of helping others is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children , and Smith has not forgotten that small act of kindness shown to her so long ago, when her now healthy and vivacious 3-year-old wore a special lavender cap, knitted by someone who cared. A picture of that hat, displayed in a basket of flowers on the Party In-kindness website, is a reminder that others can help lighten the load, even in a small way.