

Hometown Heroes

BY STACY VERMYLEN, OLD NAPLES RESIDENT

In these times of political strife and global angst, I find myself searching for those great stories that bring back your confidence in the good of mankind. Sure enough, I found three hometown heroes who are making their mark on the world in Naples, with humility and grace. A child, an older man, and a mature woman are my heroes today, and here are their stories.

First, there is Paul Campbell, an 11-year-old with a mission—collecting clothing donations for the homeless. He and his family moved to Naples from Pittsburg, where Paul, as a second grader, had started a program of collecting socks and warm clothing for those in need, to be distributed by a non-profit there. As soon as he arrived in Naples, he pursued the same type of program here with some obvious modifications, such as collecting flip-flops, ponchos, underwear, sunscreen, and light jackets to be distributed by two agencies, The Hunger and Homeless Coalition and St. Matthew's House. With Angela, his mom, to help, and many contributors, he thus far has collected over 1450 pairs of socks and essential items to be given to those who need them in Naples. He is an amazing 6th grader with quite a future, including plans to volunteer at St. Matt's. He has a donation Wishlist, called Paul's Footprints, at https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/25ZX5D20IYBCX?ref_=wl_share.

Next, have you met Tony Zollo? Tony is a retired (well, not exactly)



Paul Campbell collecting clothing donations.

professional photographer who donates his time to non-profits, taking fabulous photos so that these agencies and organizations can promote their good works. You will see him everywhere, from Ave Maria to the Naples Garden Club Tour, to the League of Women Voters events, The Naples Woman's Club, and more. Not only does he take photos as a gift, but he also delivers a thumb drive with the photos so the organizations can easily use them. He is a very generous man, busy all the time, and is an excellent photographer as well. When I mentioned I would write about him, he said, "Don't feature me, here's a woman you should write about..." He is quite humble!

So that brings me to our third hometown hero! Her name is Maria Wassef, and her non-profit organization also benefits the homeless. She delivers cupcakes to the shelters monthly for homeless residents who have had a birthday. She told me she was working at the local women's shelter several years ago and met a woman who admitted no

one had said "Happy Birthday" to her in over five years—and that is how the idea was born. "Through the simple gesture of delivering cupcakes, we look to acknowledge and feed the spirit of shelter residents on their special day," her website reads. In addition, Maria organizes a Breakfast with Santa program, which includes a free meal for 690 children, coordinated with several shelter locations around Naples. Gifts, cookies, and a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus are all part of the morning. She has created a book called *Tutti's Adventures in Cupcake Land*, and proceeds from the sale of the book help support her non-profit. Her website is <https://www.mariasbirthdaywishesforthehomeless.org>.

Bless these heroes and may they be an inspiration to all of us!

If you volunteer for a great cause or know of someone whose volunteer efforts are making a difference in the local or global community, please share your story by emailing doug.haughey@n2co.com.



Maria Wassef and her non-profit organization benefits the homeless



Tony Zollo's photo

