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SHARON CATALANO
47 BLOOMINGDALE AVE
AKRON NY 14001-1197

"JUST DONATE IT" Softball collection hits a homerun in Dominican Republic

By Sharon Catalano

Six thousand pounds is a lot of stuff. That's how much softball equipment and school supplies one determined coach with two dedicated softball teams collected last year for JUST DONATE IT - their collection and delivery of used and new softball equipment to Bani, Dominican Republic. With bases loaded, they hit a homerun when coach and several players traveled there this January to organize a softball skills clinic, league and tournament for girls in this underprivileged community.

JUST DONATE IT's lead-off hitter is Marlene Stone, coach of Akron High School's varsity softball team and Amherst Lightning travel softball team.

"When I asked the teams to commit to a year-long community service project and they responded quickly with a resounding 'yes!', it took me by surprise," recounted Stone. "By the end, my guess is that each player had volunteered about 60 hours of their time."

The unique collaboration was supported by the school principal

and athletic director and would include the help of Hilbert College's Rotaract and Enactus Club led by Professor Dan Roland. The college had an established relationship with Fundo Crème, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to community development in the region of Bani, Buffalo's sister city in DR.

At the onset, Stone knew they'd need two important things: packing materials and a warehouse. She made one cold call to a local supplier and inside of a day, Jamestown Container Company had donated 300 boxes.

"When I went to pick them up, I met with the sales manager and was not surprised to find his office full of baseball memorabilia, trophies, balls, hats, posters and things like that. Lucky like I am, I had called the right guy," she said.

A couple more calls and she had Perry's Ice Cream offering space, pallets, shrinkwrap and transport to the Niagara Falls Air Base when the collection was complete. Arrangements through the Denton Program would get the equipment to Bani. Again, Stone just felt lucky.

"But then when I asked Doyle Security Systems, the local Rotarians and Lions Club, and Amherst for help in different ways, it wasn't luck anymore. Everyone really bought in to the idea, the story and the passion that the softball teams and I had for this project," she said.

The teams put up posters, talked it up with every softball team they encountered, enjoyed some publicity from several media outlets, including a morning show practice with WKBW Channel 7, and before they knew it, they were hauling in equipment from all over Western New York.

The original plan was only for softball equipment, but the Denton Program, which allows private U.S. citizens and organizations to use space available on U.S. military cargo planes to transport humanitarian goods to countries in need, sports like softball and the equipment needed are not considered educational - a stipulation of the program. So the collection of school supplies was added to the cause, as well as a call to Akron Rule, who generously donated hundreds of pounds of school supplies.

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MAKING FRIENDS - Akron softball players quickly made friends with young children from the village and at the Nutrition Center.

Village of Akron finances moving in right direction according to audit report at Monday night's meeting

Village of Akron financials, as of May 31, 2016, were moving in the right direction according to Matthew Montalbo of Drescher & Malecki, as he presented the audit report during Monday night's board meeting.

Montalbo told Village board members his firm had no difficulties obtaining the records they needed: "There was free and open disclosure," he said.

The audit, which covered the 2015 to 2016 fiscal year, was presented in the context of a five-year trend. "The General Fund had pretty positive year," Montalbo noted. The \$158,000 unassigned fund balance at the end of the year erased a deficit of \$39,255 at the end of the 2014-2015 fiscal year, leaving a \$119,223 General Fund balance. "16.7% is recommended in the unassigned fund balance," he told board members. "We want to get to 290,000." The fund balance in 2011-2012 was \$130,645 and in 2012-2013 \$203,499. A deficit of \$2,334 was reported in 2013-2014, and the \$39,255 deficit in 2014-2015.

"Two years with a similar budget/operation, you will get here," Montalbo said reflecting on the current trend.

"The Water Fund is the most stable fund of the Village," Montalbo said. Income and expenses are stabilized according to the report, with a \$433,984 total Fund Balance at the end of 2015-2016.

He noted that the Sewer Fund

saw difficult years in 13, 14, and 15 with cash flow, resulting in a \$150,000 revenue anticipate note. "It is starting to show improvement," Montalbo said. "It was a positive year. If it continues to bring in more revenue than expenses will take a couple of years to pay down the debt. He noted this fund needs work to be self sustaining.

The Sewer Fund total fund balance was \$315,717 in 2012, \$181,241 in 2013, \$52,769 in 2014, \$26,389, and \$84,946 at the concluding of the 2015-2016 fiscal year according to the report.

Highlighting the assets included in the Electric Fund Revenues and Transfers in to expenditures and transfers out, Montalbo indicated the fund had a difficult 2015-2016 year with a drop in revenue, although costs were stable. "The unrestricted portion of net position for the years ending May 31, 2012, through May 31, 2016 were \$233,860, \$478,607, \$430,035, \$361,668 and \$39,944, respectively," Montalbo pointed out to Board members. "There is a need to focus on cash flow," he noted.

Affirming improvements in the other funds in the year ending May 31, 2016, Montalbo described the electric fund as "not favorable." "I believe you have the right people in place," he told the Board, indicating the management letter which will be part of the final audit documents will outline some significant

internal control suggestions and expressing his belief that any difficulties can be chipped away in two to three years.

Mayor Carl Patterson thanked Montalbo for the report and for the work of his firm, indicating good communication throughout the process. Patterson noted the Board is working on the areas called out in a state audit and is working on developing better internal controls. "Communication with auditors is an improvement over our previous firm," Trustee Peter Forrester noted.

Responding to a question from a resident regarding what the auditor discovered about money identified as missing in the state audit, Village Attorney Andrew Borden indicated that there were never any dollars missing, it was how it was accounted for in the budgeting process.

Board members authorized the Mayor to execute the agreement with Municipal solutions for the funding application associated with the Clean Water State Revolving Fund not to exceed \$13,000.

Attendance at the Western New York Water Works Conference on Wednesday, February 15, 2017 in Batavia, NY by Robert Lucia and Robbie Lucia was approved as was the attendance of Tammy Kelley at the Erie County Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Public Assistance Workshop on Wednesday, February 8, 2017 in

Cheektowaga.

Board members also approved an amendment to the ambulance contract to reflect a state change in EMT levels, now calling for the availability of an EMT Paramedic and EMT Basic rather than EMT Basic and EMT Intermediate, which is no longer a credential.

Resident Doug Ceisner thanked the DPW for new lights on East Ave., encouraged the Village board to continue to push the county to fix East Ave., and restated his position that the Village taxpayers should not pay for the Village Safety (Christmas party) meeting. Main Street business owner Sandy Basenello asked the board to consider regulations for how close food trucks can park to existing food establishments.

Board members approved building permits for a roof at 7 Buell Street, Roof at 34 Skyline Dr., interior renovation at 57 Main St., roof at 34 Skyline Drive, new business at 83 Main Street, and remodel at 200 East Avenue. A dumpster permit renewal for One Ice Cream Plaza was approved.

A Peddlers License was approved for Three Sisters and Little D Corp from Middleport, NY was approved. At the time of approval the Board understood that the truck was home meal delivery service similar to Schwan's. Information available following the meeting indicated that the business is a Food Truck.

The renewal plumbing license for Stanley Kandefer of West Seneca, NY was approved.

Contracts and personnel focus of Village and Town joint meeting

Akron Village Board and Newstead Town Board members met jointly Monday night to discuss mutual contracts and personnel.

The Board generally discussed their thoughts on renewing the current five year contract for Recycling/Refuse collection for another five-years when it expires at the end of 2017.

Discussion included level of satisfaction with the service as well as some changes in what is accepted in the recycling notes.

The Boards also discussed a Comprehensive Plan project they are doing together briefly. Supervisor David L. Cummings indicated he would have more information for the boards following a meeting this week with other Towns and Villages receiving Community Block Grant funds for new Master Plans.

The Boards moved into executive session to discuss the development of a joint Code Enforcement Officer position and other contract related items.



KEEPING SCORE - Abby updates the scoreboard as her new teammates look on.



TOURNAMENT - Following the last day of the softball tournament, players gathered for a group picture. (BELOW) **SIGHTSEEING** - A short time was spent sightseeing in Colonial City, the oldest permanent European settlement in the New World in the historical central neighborhood of Santo Domingo. Abby, Sydney, Sarah and Mattie rest outside the oldest cathedral in the Americas, established in 1512.

JUST DONate IT campaign from page 1

plies for the effort. Just a few weeks before the January trip to Bani, the itinerary was complete. A couple days would be spent unpacking and sorting the school supplies and softball equipment, and organizing a storage location before they would begin a softball teaching program and then a tournament.

The project was thrown the proverbial "curveball" when the Denton application was not approved in time for an airlift in 2016 (and it is still currently in queue). Coach and her four players that were headed to Bani, spent a few moments feeling disappointed but then quickly came up with another plan. They each used their one piece of checked luggage to load up on whatever equipment they could still get their hands on that wasn't already counted, boxed, palletized and past the security clearance for the shipment with the Denton Program. Then they crammed their carry-ons with a week's worth of clothes.

"For the purposes of our trip and clinic, I don't think it made any difference," said Stone. "We were able to provide each player at the clinic with a mitt, bat, ball and uniform."

When they arrived in Bani, time that would have been spent sorting equipment allowed them to participate in the service projects planned for the Hilbert students. They toured the local GOYA Foods plant and did work on a Nutrition Center Project where they first encountered children from the community and a very different culture.

All four athletes felt many similarities to their new Bani friends - they all shared a love for softball and they all just want to have fun. But of course, they expected differences in their lives and learned the reality.

"They have barely anything and they still have a good time, and we have a lot of things we take for granted," said Sydney Leeds, a senior on Akron's varsity team.

Sarah Schultz, a 2016 graduate who participated in the spring and summer collection, is currently a freshman at Niagara University and made the trip during the semester break.

"The children there were much more independent at a young age and their communities had a different feel than ours in the US," observed Sarah. "There was a strong neighborhood vibe that I really liked because most of the people are outside their houses talking to others, and the kids play sports together on the streets or basketball courts."

During the week-long trip, they relied on the help of an interpreter. In some instances, that wasn't necessary.

"When I was playing a card game with the kids at the Nutrition Center, this was just us being kids together and it didn't even matter that we couldn't speak each others' language; we could still communicate," said Abby Stone, a junior stand out athlete at ACS.

"It was surprising to me

how instantly friendly the Bani kids at the Nutrition Center and players at the clinic were to all of us. None were shy or slow to 'warm up' to us," added Coach Stone. "Quite simply, we smiled and said 'hola' and they smiled back, and it was like we were all old friends. Sometimes today our differences divide us, but there, it was nothing like that."

Even Coach Stone's husband, Kevin, who joined the team for the trip, was called out of the dugout for a play at the plate. Mr. Stone, Chief Operating Officer for Doyle Security, was asked to make an impromptu presentation to local business owners in Bani. His talk about security systems and technology infrastructure, how the business is run and how he empowers his employees, was very well received.

The softball teaching program was a success with eager players teaching eager protégés. Abby enjoyed teaching them the windmill pitch.

"When we showed them, they kept wanting to do it and learn," she said. "One

kept saying 'uno mas' (one more) over and over because she just wanted to keep trying to get better and do it one more time even though we had been practicing and playing for four hours in the sun."

Mattie Klein, a junior at Akron, described the similarity between the Dominican girls and her Akron teammates, who were all close in age.

"They reminded me of every softball team here in New York," she said. "They joked around, had fun, played hard, and loved every minute of it. I felt like I was playing with my own team."

"After we gave each of the girls a softball, most of them asked us to sign their ball - it was the greatest feeling in the world," added Sydney.

All of the girls expressed how they felt changed by the experience and look forward to an opportunity to return or to travel again and experience other cultures.

When the shipment does get to the Dominican Republic soon, Coach Stone is confident it will be stored

and distributed to girls in the community with the help of Fundo Crème and Yomaira Pena, the councilwoman of Bani who also coaches the international softball team in the Dominican Republic. Pena met with Coach Stone and her players, sharing her appreciation for the project and how much the equipment is needed. Two local DR television crews picked up on the story, too, even making a second trip back for the softball tournament.

"It's hard to judge in just seven days what kind of difference we made, but if you check out our pictures, the smiles say it all," said Stone reflectively. "Maybe, if just for a moment, we connected with some young girls and made them feel like we cared and shared with them something that's been a positive force in our own lives. And maybe, if just for a moment, we felt thankful for the blessings in our own lives because we've always had these opportunities. I suspect those feelings will last much longer than a moment - for me anyway, they'll last a lifetime."

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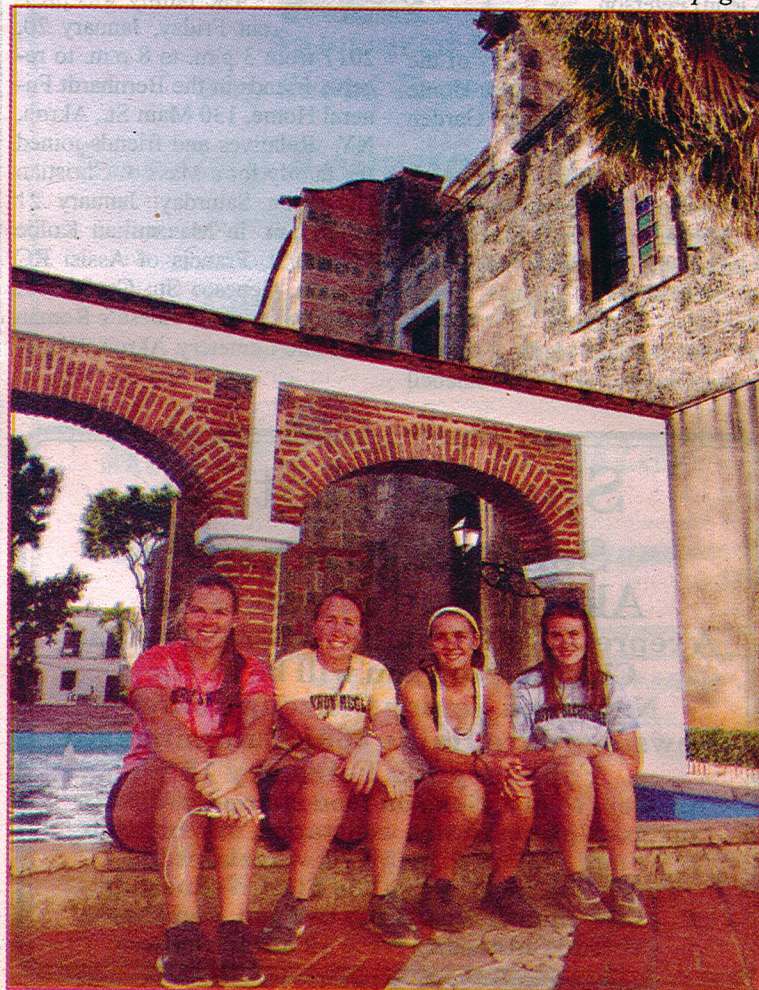
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JUST DONate IT campaign from page 4

They are all hoping for extra munnings. The real measure would be to return every year and see how the league develops.

On their last day, Pena invited them back next year because she believes they can continue to have new game strategies and practice ideas. She wants to be able to show the growth and progress this initial service trip set in action.

Is there anything else that still needs to be collected?

"Sneakers! We need to bring them sneakers – so many of the kids were playing barefoot or in flip-flops!" said Coach Stone with a laugh.

Sounds like a line drive for a second successful JUST DONate IT campaign!

Movies planned at Newstead Senior Center

The Newstead Senior Center on Cummings Road, Akron is adding movies in the afternoon in 2017.

Come on Tuesday, January 31 for a showing of *Florence Foster Jenkins* at 12:45 p.m. The movie stars Meryl Streep as this 1940's socialite who wants to be a great opera singer. Sign up for lunch and stay for the movie.

UPCOMING TRIPS

- March 12 to March 13 – Seneca Allegany Overnight trip
- March 13 to March 15 – Flowers, Food and Fun in Philadelphia
- More details to follow

New Hours

New hours began at the Center on December 1, and run through April 1. The Center is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesday's hours are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Some of the programs at the Akron/Newstead Senior Center, 5691 Cummings Rd., Akron, NY are open to all seniors in the Town of Newstead, such as the daily lunches, outreach programs, and some trips. Others are offered only to members of Akron/Newstead Senior Citizens Inc.

AARP SMART DRIVER COURSE

Save money on your car insurance and increase your driving skills by attending the AARP Safe Driving Class. The fee will be \$20 for AARP members and \$25 for non-members. The class schedule is as follows: March 14, May 9, July 11, September 12, and November 14. Pick a date that works for you and call the center to register no later than one week prior to the class to secure your seat.

Stay Fit Dining

All seniors 60 years of age and older are welcome to participate in the Erie County Stay Fit Dining Program which offers noon-time meals at the Akron/Newstead Senior Center, located at 5691 Cummings Road.

The lunches are served Monday through Friday with the seniors paying a suggested contribution of \$3.00 per meal, for those under 60 it is \$5.00. Everyone 60 years of age and older, regardless of the level of their income, is welcome to participate in this program. All donations are confidential and no one is denied a meal due to an inability to pay. Membership in the Akron-Newstead Senior Citizens is not required.

Reservations and information can be obtained by calling 542-6645 or stopping in the Senior Center at least 48 hours in advance. This center provides a wide variety of activities daily including: bingo, cards, line dancing, educational speakers, computers, crafts,

etc. The center provides a warm, welcoming group of seniors so you don't have to eat alone.

Call 542-6645 to reserve your lunch, call the center.

Thursday, Jan. 26 – Entrée Salad: tuna macaroni salad, mixed greens w/dressing, pickled sliced beets, wheat dinner roll, fruited gelatin

Friday, Jan. 27 – Chili con carne w/cheddar cheese, peas and carrots, apple juice, unsalted crackers, peach Bavarian

Monday, Jan. 30 – Swedish meatballs over Cavatappi pasta, Brussel sprouts, sweet corn, chocolate pudding

Tuesday, Jan. 31 – Julienne Entrée Salad: sliced ham, turkey, Swiss cheese, egg, fresh mixed lettuce w/dressing, cherry tomatoes and carrots, fresh fruit

Wednesday, Feb. 1 – Baked lasagna roll w/meat sauce and mozzarella, spinach and mushrooms, cauliflower, wheat roll, tropical fruit

Thursday, Feb. 2 – Sliced turkey breast w/gravy and stuffing, chive mashed potatoes, carrot coins, molded cranberry salad.

Friday, Feb. 3 – Homemade stuffed pepper with savory tomato sauce, mashed potatoes, wax beans with mushroom, dinner roll, chocolate brownie.

Monday, February 6 – Chunk Turkey with penne pasta and cream, carrot coins, chopped broccoli, fruit delight cookie.

Tuesday, Feb. 7 Stuffed shells with meat sauce, cauliflower, tender peas, fruited gelatin.

Wednesday, Feb. 8 – Chopped steakhouse burger with Jardiniere gravy, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, pineapple tidbits.

Thursday, Feb. 9 – Breaded chicken cutlet with gravy, hamburger roll, mashed sweet potatoes, chef salad with dressing, strawberry Bavarian.

Movie Night

Movie Night is planned for Thursday, February 23 at 5:30 p.m. The movie will be *Jason Bourne*, the fifth installment of the Jason Bourne film series and direct sequel to the 2007 *The Bourne Ultimatum*. Matt Damon reprises his role as the main character, former CIA assassin and psychogenic amnesiac Jason Bourne. In the film, Bourne remains on the run from CIA hit squads as he tries to uncover hidden truths about his father. The night's dinner will be baked lasagna, salad and dessert. Cost is \$5.00; please sign up at the center by Thursday, February 16.

CASINO DAY

Monday, February 27 is the next casino trip to Seneca Niagara. The bus will leave at 8:30 a.m. The cost for the trip is \$16 and you will receive \$25 in free play and \$5 for food. Sign up ASAP to guarantee your seat on the bus.



BIG SWING: The Batavia Swing Band returns to the Wright Center on Saturday, March 18 at 7:30 p.m.

'Wright Kids' and locally produced award winning films featured at Wright Center

"Wright Kids" Movies will be honored on Sunday, January 29 at 6:00 p.m. as the film crew is recognized for their work at the C Dee Wright Community Center, 11 Church St., Akron, NY.

The evening will feature Choices Determine Your Life and Sleepover, Underage Drinking public service message movies completely made by the "the Wright Kids". An introduction by the producers Becky Parker and Gary Sundown is planned.

There will also be a showing of Gary Sundown's award winning feature: "Bury My Heart With Tonawanda" which is directed by local Seneca actor Gary Sundown, from a script by Adrian Esposito of Rochester. It is the story of a young man with Down syndrome who escapes while being transported to a home for the insane in the late 1800s and finds his way into Western New York's Native American community. The people of the Tonawanda Seneca Nation welcome the disabled newcomer and help him grow into maturity, even as their own culture faces challenges from encroaching European-based society.

The Wright Center is sponsoring this event with support from the Akron Newstead Community Coalition.

Call Walt 542-4902 or e-mail roso6085@aol.com to save your seat or for more information

Concerts planned in February and March

The Wright Center will feature Jimmy Dee as Frank Sinatra in a concert "Sinatra his way" on Saturday February 18 at 7:30 p.m.

Jimmy Dee is a native of Batavia and has shared his talent for years singing with pre-recorded authentic Sinatra background at various venues including the Quarterdeck, Myrtle Beach, Batavia Downs, Silver Lake C.C. and many others

There is no admission fee, although donations are appreciated. Snacks non-alcohol drinks available. Contact Walt at 542-4902 or roso6085@aol.com for questions or to save your spot.

The Batavia Swing Band returns to the Wright Center on Saturday, March 18 at 7:30 p.m. All are encouraged to bring their dancing shoes. No admission charge, do-

nations appreciated. Snacks, pop, water and coffee available.

Call Walt 542-4902 or e-mail roso6085@aol.com to reserve your spot or with questions

Tai Chi Chih class for Beginners

TAI CHI CHIH FOR BEGINNERS

Tai Chi Chih for Beginners is coming to the Wright Center. Participants will learn 20 movements in this fun class designed to help with balance, circulation, memory, stiff joints and more.

No special clothing or equipment needed. Eight consecutive classes for one fee*. If you miss a week, no worries, Denise will make sure you learn them all.

Mondays 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. starting January 30, 2017.

Register by calling Denise Miller, accredited Tai Chi Chih Teacher at 716-572-2096 or e-mail Diane at roso6085@aol.com

*If after completing the first class, you decide not to continue, there is no charge.

A Community Public Service Event...

Help send Maya Griffin to the British Isles as a Student Ambassador by attending

AN EVENING OF MUSIC FUNDRAISER CONCERT, REFRESHMENTS, BASKET RAFFLE

Saturday, February 11 at 6:00 PM

Akron Free Methodist Church
6 Scotland Rd. Akron, NY 14001



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