

STORIES of INSPIRATION

2019

S.P.A.R.K

Society



All it takes is a spark.

2019 S.P.A.R.K. SOCIETY INSPIRING OTHERS

Through our interest in localized causes, special needs individuals, families facing challenges, and community outreach, the S.P.A.R.K. Society is dedicated to inspiring positive change and enriching the lives closest to you.

The S.P.A.R.K. Society encourages individuals in our communities (like you) to select a cause utilizing the S.P.A.R.K. Society gift cards to provide financial support to those in need. We look to you to be the spark by suggesting a cause, donating money, donating your time or supplies or just doing an act of random kindness.

This year, the S.P.A.R.K. Society chose forty members to receive either a \$50 or \$100 gift card in the hope that with it, they would create a Small Purposeful Act of Random Kindness and do something great, or to give the card to a person or organization that would.

There were no expectations of repayment, no strings attached, but that the recipient would use the gift in a way to achieve something truly meaningful, and share the results with the giver.

New this year and going forward, the S.P.A.R.K. Society will also be "paying it forward" and choosing one honorary recipient of the S.P.A.R.K. Society "IGNITE a SPARK" donation. The "IGNITE a SPARK" donation will be given to an individual or group that with our support will also be able to one day provide opportunities and be able to pay it forward. This year's recipient is Primrose School of Middleton.



Here are their stories.

* Those that matched, added additional dollars or donations to their initial S.P.A.R.K. Society Gift Card are indicated by a ^{SUPERSCRIPT} number by the title.

S.P.A.R.K.

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“Woof”



Julie Logue is a volunteer for Underground Pet Rescue, an all breed companion animal rescue based in Madison and serving all of Dane County. Julie's mission, as well as that of Underground, is to find permanent homes for animals in need and to enrich lives by strengthening the connection between animals and people through community services and outreach. They are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Julie opens her home to foster dogs and has fostered 65 dogs over the past two years. My sister adopted a dog who was fostered by Julie and witnessed firsthand her most amazing dedication to animals. Julie recently accepted a dog (Hannah) from Alabama who was expecting a litter of puppies. Hannah's history included abuse and she has scars from her trauma. Julie assisted Hannah with the birth of 9 puppies and is currently feeding the puppies around the clock due to Hannah becoming ill.

While Underground provides veterinarian services to the foster dogs, the foster volunteers are responsible for providing food, supplies and a safe, nurturing environment for the animals in their care. Julie funds the fostering expenses by working full-time from home and supplements her income with a part-time job.

Julie's mission is to “save lives.” The gift card came at an especially difficult and important time with the many expenses related to the care of Hannah and her brood. She wishes to express her gratitude for the S.P.A.R.K. Society's gift and its important support of causes such as hers.



- Patricia & Bruce
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.



2019 Midwest Financial Group S.P.A.R.K. Society “IGINTE a SPARK” Recipient

Meet Amanda and Mark Kienbaum, parents to three young girls and proud Franchise Owners of Primrose School of Middleton. Longtime supporters of Primrose Schools, the Kienbaums are thrilled to bring the quality experience they know and love to the children and families of Middleton.

Amanda was first introduced to Primrose Schools in 2006 when she accepted a director position at a Primrose school in Minnesota. She previously worked in children's services, so she immediately warmed to the nurturing environment she observed at the school. Impressed and inspired by the Primrose commitment to serve each individual child and family, Amanda knew right away that she'd found the perfect fit — both for her career and for the care of her own children in the future.

“What I love most about Primrose is we're all truly focused on the child,” said Amanda. “The Balanced Learning® approach is unparalleled and its focus on character development helps each child set the foundation she needs for success. But the piece that has always stood out the most to me is the investment in each individual child and family.”

Mark, too, has a past with Primrose Schools that began before the Kienbaums started exploring their options as Franchise Owners. In fact, Primrose is tied into the couple's love story — they met through a colleague of Amanda while she was in her director position.

“Back when Amanda and I met and she first introduced me to Primrose, I told her if I had kids, I would send them to Primrose right then and there,” Mark said. “That's how strongly I felt about the brand from the very start.”

For the Kienbaums, opening Primrose School of Middleton is a dream come true. They're eager to bring Primrose to families in a community where they saw a distinct need for a premier, quality early education and care provider. Their own daughters, Myra, Eden and Emery, will all attend the school once it opens.

Amanda, who graduated from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities with a degree in child psychology, will bring her passion for serving children with years of experience in child education to the school. Mark will provide his expertise in marketing and finance to support the behind-the-scenes operations. A business graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, he grew up in Southern Wisconsin and has always believed Middleton is the perfect location to open a Primrose school.

“Not only is this area home to one of the best school districts in the state, but it's also a thriving business center,” said Mark. “Now, many commuting parents can have peace of mind knowing there is a premier child care option close to where they work that will fully prepare their children for success in school and life.”

Amanda and Mark enjoy offering Middleton families a loving, warm atmosphere where their children can grow Active Minds, Healthy Bodies and Happy Hearts®. As Franchise Owners, their goal is to provide parents with an environment



Amanda and Mark Kienbaum

where they can feel good about leaving their children, knowing their little ones are receiving the best quality of care.

Opened in August 2016, Primrose School of Middleton features the Balanced Learning® curriculum in infant through Private Pre-Kindergarten classrooms and the Primrose Explorers after-school and summer program for students up to age 12. Developed and taught exclusively at Primrose Schools, the research-informed curriculum blends purposeful play with nurturing guidance to encourage curiosity, confidence and compassion.

www.PrimroseMiddleton.com.



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In late summer of 2018, Primrose School of Middleton was hit hard with the massive flooding and had to be relocated to Blackhawk Church. New business owners, Mark and Amanda Kienbaum along with their three young children, parents and the teachers of Primrose School have been volunteering immeasurable hours to get the school functioning again. Through all of that, Primrose School continues to inspire lightbulb moments each day with their balanced learning approach by teaching children about empathy, social needs, and giving back.

"Primrose School of Middleton is more than just a daycare, it's a school that teaches children the importance of values, kindness and creativity," said Matt Cuplin, President of Midwest Financial Group. "We hope our donation will help, so children will be able to continue to discover, learn, and excel here for years to come."

This year, Midwest Financial Group, proud sponsor of the S.P.A.R.K. Society (Small Purposeful Act of Random Kindness), donated \$500 to the Primrose School of Middleton, which will help rebuild and continue to inspire lightbulb moments each day.

The Leader in Early Education and Care®

Primrose Schools® is a national family of accredited early education and care schools serving infants through kindergarten, after-schoolers, their families and communities. With our Balanced Learning® approach, we nurture curiosity, confidence, creativity and compassion. This helps spark lightbulb moments that lead to a lifelong love of learning.



Midwest Financial Group representatives present a check for \$500 to Primrose Schools. (Pictured left to right) Scott Wieland, Midwest Financial Group Benefits Specialist, Ryan Lee, Midwest Financial Group Office Manager, Kristen Salewski, Midwest Financial Group Marketing Director, Kane Schrader, Midwest Financial Group Associate Advisor, Mark and Amanda Kienbaum, Owners of Primrose Schools, and Eric Iwanski, Midwest Financial Group Associate Advisor.

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“Comedy Cures”

For the past seven years we have been the recipients of care, guidance and gifts from Gilda's Club of Madison. Cancer support groups and activities have helped us get through some rough patches and we have developed friendships. Everything is offered freely by Gilda's.

This S.P.A.R.K. gift is our chance to pay it forward to the Club for all it has done to make our lives a little easier.

- Madison, WI



Because laughter
really is the best
medicine.



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

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“Best Shift Ever”



DO THE BEST YOU
CAN UNTIL YOU
KNOW BETTER.
THEN WHEN YOU
KNOW BETTER
DO BETTER.
- MAYA ANGELOU

We were honored to participate in the S.P.A.R.K. Society this year. We decided to give our gift card to a waitress who works at our favorite restaurant. She is a struggling, single mom trying to make ends meet by waitressing. On the night, we decided to give it to her, when we arrived at the restaurant, she was saying goodbye to her co-workers as she was going to have surgery and be out for an extended period of time re-cooperating. She was ecstatic when we presented the card to her and gave us heartfelt hugs.

- Madison, WI



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“To Be Humble and Kind”

**"ROCK
BOTTOM
BECAME THE
SOLID
FOUNDATION
ON WHICH I
REBUILT MY
LIFE."**

- J.K. Rowling

This lady lost her job due to a merger. Being a senior with limited office skills, finding another job has been challenging and depressing. The phone interview goes well, until the face to face. The unspoken age discrimination happens. This lady works two jobs for small wages and a few tips to make ends meet. When I presented her with the S.P.A.R.K. card, she wanted to use a portion of her gift to help someone. I told her "no!" this was intended to help her now. When she is on her feet she could pay it forward. This woman became very ill after receiving the S.P.A.R.K. card. She has not been able to work for two weeks, so the card has filled a small financial void.

- McFarland, WI

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S.P.A.R.K.

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“Doing The Most Good²”

I was able to help The Salvation Army during their Matching Saturday. I matched the \$50 S.P.A.R.K. card, so my contribution was \$100. Then that was matched, so it was a \$200 donation.

- McFarland, WI



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S.P.A.R.K

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“9 Lives”

The day before Christmas, I read a newspaper article on smaller charities in southern Wisconsin. One of the charities talked about was “9 Lives Rescue”. The organization was started just three years ago by a woman, Janell Moody, who volunteered at other rescue organizations before starting her own. 9 Lives Rescue does not have its own shelter so all the felines (which were homeless, unwanted or abused)

are fostered in loving homes while waiting for their forever families. Janell’s other mission is to encourage people to spay/neuter their pets and farm cats. The organization had a recent large emergency vet bill and higher than usual costs this summer from kitten medical expenses.



I’ve been a “crazy cat lady” since I was a little girl on the farm. The first barn cat I brought in the house was “Mrs. Motor”.

She was the mother of all kittens and had a purr that just wouldn’t quit. Giving to this organization seemed like a purr-fect fit for me.

- Mary
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

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“The Road Less Traveled”

I was very excited to be offered an opportunity to participate in the S.P.A.R.K. Society gifting adventure. I love the idea. This is how we can make a difference, small and purposeful. One act of kindness leads to another and practiced every day will change the world. Also, it reminded me how fortunate I am to be blessed with a life where I have a safe, warm home to call my own, access to financial resources and the love of family and friends. There are so many people in our society that are less fortunate and would really benefit from a small gift that could bring a little joy into their life. My first difficulty was in deciding how best to start a S.P.A.R.K. I received and responded to a neighborly “next-door” post about a local family in need. I inquired as to whether I could meet them and possibly take some of the kids shopping. The family, however, wished to remain anonymous and so I decided to look further.

After much thought and research on the Internet, I came upon, “The Road Home Dane County”. An organization that provides opportunities for homeless children and their families. Homelessness really struck a note with me. It’s often called “the invisible problem” and although you may not see it every day, it’s here in our community. Over 1200 children in the Madison School District were identified as homeless last year. And one night in January, nearly 600 people in our community didn’t have a place to sleep. I knew immediately that this is where I wanted to employ my S.P.A.R.K gift and bring a little warmth into the life of a homeless child.



- Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Living Life²”



This year we offered kindness to a couple of families. Our church and school started a daycare center this past fall. We inquired with the center to see if there were any families in need. The family we chose was very surprised by our gift. The wife had lost her job and they are without healthcare coverage. We had never met this family as they are new to our church. Just so happens we saw them the following Sunday after we had given them the gift, which gave us the opportunity to formally introduce ourselves. Our hope is that a new friendship has developed and we can be there for them as time goes on.

The second act of kindness was paying for a random family's grocery bill. I was shopping at Aldi's and a mature couple with a granddaughter caught my eye. As I got in the checkout isle they were a few customers ahead of me. I decided to excuse myself past the customers in between us and whispered to them that I'd like to pay for their groceries. They were dumbfounded. The look in their eyes was that of shock. The gentleman had been in a car accident and could no longer work. They count every dollar they spend (the wife told me). My heart melted at the thought they the Lord truly led me to this family.

It truly is better to give than receive.

- Matt & Susan
Ixonia, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“New Traditions²”

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

— Maya Angelou

Spending time with our two grandchildren is one of the greatest joys in our lives. We had a teachable moment with our four year old granddaughter the other day thanks to our S.P.A.R.K. card. We matched the amount and decided to take her shopping for gifts for children less fortunate, explaining to her what that meant on our way to the store. We went up and down every toy aisle filling our cart. Not once did she ask for anything for herself or her brother. After checking out, we delivered all the toys to a collection site. She unloaded them under the tree.

Driving her home she asked if we could do this again next year making it one of our Christmas traditions. So, thank you Midwest Financial for helping us remember the true meaning of Christmas and helping us start a new tradition in our family.

- Oregon, WI



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S.P.A.R.K Society

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“A Passion For Making Lives Better”

Our daughter is a social work student and volunteers at the House of Mercy in Janesville, Wisconsin. The House of Mercy is a transitional home that assists women and families in hard times. They provide food, shelter, clothing, daily necessities, and resources to help individuals obtain employment and housing. The shelter has a wish list with items such as deodorant, baby items, soap, and other products to help the women and families in need. My husband and I donated items such as baby wash/lotion, baby wipes, dish soap, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner and mouthwash to help these families in need. We are more aware of the hardships individuals and families in our community face. Thanks for the opportunity to help and we look forward to contributing in the future.

- Dave & Terri
Janesville, WI


Dear Friends at S.P.A.R.K.,

The House of Mercy Homeless Center is a 25 bed facility that provides homeless families with short-term emergency shelter and access to housing, job placement and child care resources. Since opening in 1996, the Center has provided shelter and support to more than 6,300 individuals.

Without the assistance of our community coming together and embracing the House of Mercy's mission, we would not be where we are today. You allow the House of Mercy to be a safe place to stay for those who are homeless and help us endorse those who are less fortunate within our community. Your donation assists in making this possible.

Many thanks for your gift of personal hygiene products. Your thoughtfulness for others is greatly appreciated by our residents, staff and volunteers.

Sincerely


Tammie King-Johnson
Manager



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

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“Hope²”

We knew right away what we would be doing with our S.P.A.R.K. money this year. We live in the Wisconsin Heights Community of Black Earth and Mazomanie, where severe flooding really impacted many residents as well as businesses. Several families are still not able to be back in their homes, while countless others were evacuated for weeks or months, after losing much of the contents of their home and then having to come up with tens of thousands of dollars to fix their homes. Many of those people had to spend all they had and max out credit cards despite having flood insurance.

The spirit and support of the towns stayed strong despite all the struggle, and people rallied around those affected. We took our \$50 and gave another \$50 and put the money in two cards with these words:

***The flood brought you grief, it's true,
But know our community is here for you.
Though your home was damaged and belongings gone,
We hope and pray your spirit stays strong.***



On Christmas Eve we drove to two of the houses that were severely damaged. Our kids dropped the cards on each of the front porches.

One house belonged to an older couple who were without power, heat and water for quite a while and who had to completely rebuild their foundation walls. The wife had moved out for several weeks while the husband stayed, as he just didn't want to leave the familiarity of home. We ran into them while on a walk several months before Christmas and talked for quite a while. They had used all their savings and were feeling overwhelmed by the financial burden.

The other house where we dropped a card off was still not safe to live in, although the owners had decorated for Christmas and there were lights strung and a large lit up Santa figure in the window. On the front porch door there was a sign that said “Hope”.

We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the S.P.A.R.K. Society and hopefully start a spark of kindness that will remind others that they are cared about, that there is good in the world, and that they can pass that spark onto others.

- Ryan & Katie
Blue Mounds, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K. Society

2019

“One. And For All.²”

Since 1977, DAIS has worked passionately and effectively to ensure the safety and well-being of domestic violence survivors and their families, and to change societal attitudes that perpetuate violence and the abuse of power.

Along with my \$50 S.P.A.R.K. card, I purchased another \$50 card and gave them both to DAIS of Dane County so they could purchase items needed for their shelter.

- Suzanne
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Hope 2 Others”

The Mahlum family has experienced adversity in the past with two daughters who had extended stays in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. This past summer, they experienced another potentially life threatening event. They lived in downtown Sun Prairie and on July 10, 2018 their home was destroyed in an explosion that continues to impact them and that city to this day. Thankfully, the entire family was safe, however, they lost everything but the clothes on their backs. At Christmas, the organization “Hope 2 Others” was organizing donations to make sure the family could have a Merry Christmas.



I was so very happy to be able to offer a S.P.A.R.K. card to brighten their holiday. It was wonderful to be able to help this family who was devastated by the explosion and needed to rebuild their lives to be able to just focus on making sure their girls could have a happy holiday.

- Rod & Monica
Fitchburg, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Making it Happen”

Once again, we were given the opportunity to pay it forward. The decision who to share this gift with isn't any easier this year. We once again turned to our Pastor and asked for his assistance and guidance. Pr. Joe made an excellent recommendation.

We are all familiar with the phrase, “can't see the forest for the trees,” well that is exactly what we experienced with our choice. I had a co-worker, who I shall call “Dee” who is faithful to her God and family. What I knew about Dee

is that she works very hard, raising her family of 5 children by herself I had no idea that Dee is a survivor of spousal abuse, both physical and mental and she was truly alone in raising her family. I was also unaware that Dee works 3 jobs, 7 days a week, in order to keep a roof over her children's heads and food on their table. Now this alone may not make Dee unique, there are many survivors who work everyday of the week to provide for their families.

What does make Dee unique and deserving of this gift, is her incredible giving nature. Last month when everyone is even busier getting things ready for the holidays Dee took on yet another task. Dee works at our Church, which was going to be hosting a community holiday meal. The immediate community of our Church tends to be single parent homes and those who are under or unemployed. A call came into the Church asking if the Church could provide Christmas

gifts for the children who would be attending the meal. Now the Church did not have the resources to provide gifts. Dee could not tolerate the idea of these children not receiving gifts, so she took this task on herself Dee solicited local businesses for contributions. She then shopped for gifts, wrapped the gifts for 60 children! This was on top of working her 3 jobs and caring for her family. Personally, I would find this a daunting task if I had a year to do it. Dee did this within 10 days of the community meal.

So, our S.P.A.R.K. cards were more of a thank you to Dee for all she does and hopefully provided her a moment to catch her breath for a minute.

- Richard & Linda
McFarland, WI



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S.P.A.R.K

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“SOAR”

SOAR Case Management Services is a non-profit organization that has been providing services to people who have serious and mental illness since its inception in 1997. As I helped this organization get started and continue with it as the current chair of their Board, I can attest to the many people who have benefited greatly from their services over the years.



While the primary emphasis is providing mental health services, basic needs (food, clothing, & shelter) are also important as most of the people receiving these services are living with very low financial benefits. Therefore, SOAR provides assurance that security deposits and rents are paid along with many other basic needs met, as a part of keeping people stable in the community. This year the staff also provided gift bags that included a winter hat, winter socks, and a number of hygiene products. The S.P.A.R.K. contribution helped to defray the cost of this helping kindness. Staff acknowledged how heartwarming it was to see the deep appreciation expressed by the recipients. Thank you S.P.A.R.K for helping make this act of kindness possible. In giving to others our own lives become fuller and richer.

- Dave & Jane
Middleton, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“A Night Out On The Town”

This fall, John and Liz began attending our church. They had both relocated to Madison so they could help with care of John's father, who was showing signs of dementia. Although John had grown up in Wisconsin, they had lived for a number of years in Manhattan. Coming back to the Midwest was obviously going to take some serious adjustment. For example, they had not had to have an automobile in Manhattan. Also, they had to find new jobs. Liz found a job dealing with scheduling at a large



psychological counseling center, so she was bombarded with lots of people with problems during her work day, and then on off time helping take care of a man with evolving dementia. John took a job in sales and getting started was challenging so their finances were clearly stretched. Between worries about finances and dealing with scheduling time to deal with a difficult family health care problem, they had to opportunity to really take care of themselves. So, we added to the S.P.A.R.K. card, telling them they should use the money to do something for themselves such as a night out on the town.

- Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Two is Better Than One”

Beth Stofflet had been a teacher for many years but was struggling with a career change. She decided to take the plunge and leave teaching to pursue a new career opportunity. We gave her the S.P.A.R.K. card as encouragement to find a career that she would find fulfilling and less stressful than teaching had become. She really appreciated the encouragement and support that the S.P.A.R.K. card provided and found it inspiring to know that we believed in her.

Two is better than one and
together we can make a
difference.

Leslene Allicia Britz

We found out from our hairdresser that a customer of hers had been going through a particularly difficult time. The customer's husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer and so had to stop working. She had to take time off to care for him. While she was caring for him, she had knee-replacement surgery. Unfortunately, there was a problem with the new knee so she had to have surgery again to fix it. A while after all this happened, she fell and sustained an injury that required medical attention. During all these trying circumstances, she has been unfailingly positive. After hearing her story from our hairdresser, we knew she would be the perfect candidate to receive a S.P.A.R.K. card.

It was wonderful to be able to help two such deserving people, and we're grateful for the S.P.A.R.K. Society and Midwest Financial Group for helping to make this happen. This is such a worthwhile endeavor, and we appreciate being a small part of it.

- Anne & Beth
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“We’re In This Together”


Kassidy is a Ripon College basketball player recently diagnosed with lymphoma. She is in a hospital in St. Louis which is 1 ½ hours from her parents. I sent the S.P.A.R.K. card to her parents for gas. I was an assistant coach at Ripon for 14 years and I’m an Alum. Cancer recently touched my life and I know how important family is during the fight!

- Horicon, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“A Star of Wonder Shining Bright”




The brightest stars
are those who shine
for the benefit
of others

This year I chose a young family who's living off one income, but most importantly to provide a brighter Christmas. The mom cannot work at this time. She was on a prescription drug for pain due to a medical condition that developed 10 years ago. Now the Doctor wants to eliminate the medicine because it causes dependency to it.

The husband had to give up Youth Ministry to obtain a job with better pay and benefits. The family has three young boys to raise on one paycheck income. The husband works with my daughter who shared their story with me. My daughter was also able to help the family out as well with giving them her son's clothing that he had out grown.

- Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Feed The Hungry”

This S.P.A.R.K. donation, in addition to others, provided much needed meals/food throughout the Madison and Dane County areas. These contributions support needs such as childhood hunger programs, senior hunger, food rescues, mobile pantries, and school hunger programs. Second Harvest is a member of Feeding America, a nationwide network of food banks.

- Bob & Carol
Waunakee, WI



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“Lunch Time²”

You hear about kids at schools that have large unpaid lunch money funds, so this year we gave to the Elvehjem Elementary School (our neighborhood school) the \$50 S.P.A.R.K. card plus \$50 to help a family in need.



Hopefully, this will take some stress off the families during this special holiday season.

Thank you Midwest Financial again for allowing us to participate and spread hope and cheer.

- John & Jane
Madison, WI



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“Hunger’s Hope”

Second Harvest Foodbank held a Hunger’s Hope Radiothon, and all donations made were doubled. Gifts made during the radiothon help support the Mobile Pantry Program.



Second Harvest Foodbank’s Mobile Pantry Program accounts for one-fourth of all the food they distribute in a year. The program provides an invaluable supplement to the work local partner agencies are providing to those facing hunger in southwestern Wisconsin. My S.P.A.R.K. donation turned into 600 meals.

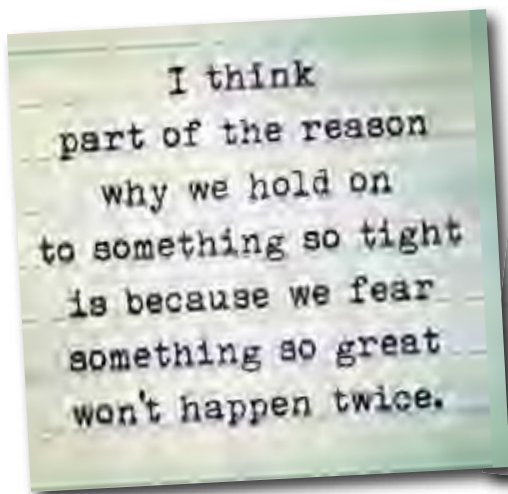
- Pam
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Helping Hand”

We were able to help a married couple whose home had burned to the ground in August. This happened the night that our town received 15 inches of rain in 24 hours, causing massive flooding. While this couple was helping people in town deal with the flooding, their own home was struck by lightning. No one was home at the time and the house was a total loss. Hopefully, this S.P.A.R.K. card will help them rebuild their house and home.



- Cross Plains, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

2019

Society

“Building The New²”

“THE SECRET OF
CHANGE IS TO FOCUS
ALL OF YOUR ENERGY,
NOT ON FIGHTING THE
OLD, BUT ON BUILDING
THE NEW.”

— SOCRATES

I used my S.P.A.R.K. card to help a father of five who lost their home to fire. The Iowa County family lost everything December 8th when their home burned to the ground while they were on vacation. Along with the \$50.00 S.P.A.R.K. card, I also matched the amount.

- Vicki
Middleton, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

Society

2019

“Working Together is Success”



The Salvation Army, with its high rating as a charitable organization, is always high on our donation list. We donated the \$50 S.P.A.R.K. card to them.

We added our own spark of giving to double the donation and as a retired reading specialist, I understand the value of reading ability and reading skills in relation to crime. Community Read will send tutors into homes to teach. The program has been recently added to the Madison Community Policing Foundation.

- Burnett, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

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Society

“Education is Powerful”



I met with a staff member at Lincoln Elementary School in Madison to deliver the S.P.A.R.K.! A few years ago, I volunteered at this school in their after school homework program. It was a safe place for the kids to be and also get some help from one of us if they needed help with homework. The kids taught me more than I am sure I helped them. They were so full of hope and love.

We love this program!

- Sun Prairie, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“The Great Flood”

"Reflections on the Great Flood"

Middleton H.S. Creative Writing Students

By: Sami Woldt

My Home

*Where I went on a quest through the woods,
Where I went on an exploration during Biology,
Where I went to go take photos,
Where I used to go to get away from the world for a bit,
Where I used to hide from friends,
Where I experienced wildlife,
Where I brainstormed my genuine ideas,
Where I pretended I'll fall in as I hopped over the stones,
Where I invented an art project that came to life,
Where I could wander and get lost,
Where I could live my day peacefully,
Where I met my bestest friends,
Where I learned impactful knowledge during class trips,
Where I experienced true happiness,
Where I made my greatest memories,*

*Pheasant Branch,
You will forever be my home*

The Pheasant Branch Conservancy suffered devastating damage in the floods of 2018. We have enjoyed the Conservancy for many years hiking and enjoying the wildlife. I even played along the banks of the creek as a young child before it was called The Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

We hope to help the Friends of Pheasant Branch continue to rebuild habitats and trails so we and others may continue to enjoy nature and the out-of-doors locally.

- Middleton, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

Society

2019

“Reach Out”

I gave my S.P.A.R.K. gift card to Reach Out Lodi. They describe themselves as a place where all people can gather and where families in need can come for assistance.


Since Doug's hunting accident in 2016, where he was paralyzed from the chest down, we have had many people and companies step up to help us. It was truly an overwhelming outpouring of prayers, money, donations, and help in many forms. I chose to give the VISA card to reach out Lodi because although they could not help with needed in home health care, they have taught us that if we come to them for other things like groceries and basic living supplies, we can use the money we saved to help defer the cost of the daily in home care Doug receives.



They do so many things for our community so I thought they were very deserving of the card. I believe they are going to give it to a local family in need. They were very appreciative.

Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity to give back for all the people that have helped us.

- Doug & Karen
Lodi, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

2019

Society

“Changing Peoples Lives⁸”

Have you seen the movie “Amelie”? The storyline is that a young woman decides to change the lives of others through small good deeds. With this character in mind, I used my S.P.A.R.K. card during a couple of weeks in December. I decided to say “Yes” to anyone who asked for support and to where that support would ripple into the local community and/or invest in someone’s self-improvement efforts.

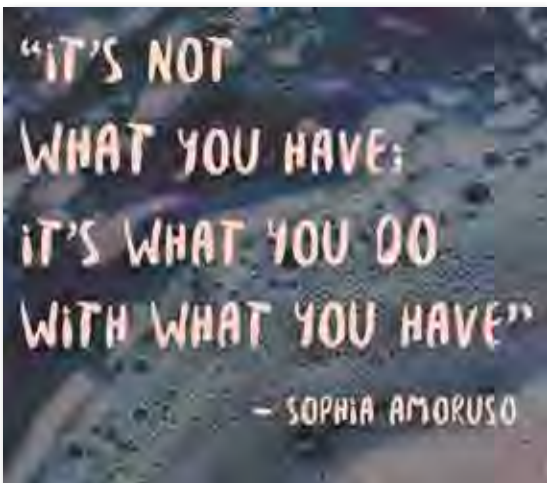
My weeks of S.P.A.R.K. activity started with the Salvation Army bell ringers as I entered the grocery store. From there, I donated money to Second Harvest (the store doubled my donation that day), and headed home. In my email in-box, I answered a request from a new political candidate promoting environmental causes. I responded to a donor drive on

Wisconsin Public Radio, and invested in a small company described in the Isthmus newspaper (dog biscuits baked by a formerly incarcerated person). I sent a small donation for seeds to a community garden located in a low-income neighborhood (I also volunteer my time there). When the Street Pulse newspaper vendors and I crossed paths, I bought several and paid it forward for others. Lastly, I donated a small amount to the Wikipedia Foundation moving from local to extremely global in impact.

For me, the donations sparked conversations with recipients, but also with my family, friends, and co-workers. I plan to stay in touch with several of my “awardees” and continue to invest in their ideas and efforts. The icing on the cake? I felt like Amelie for a week or more. I was a phenomenal way to end the year.

Thank you for the opportunity!

- Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K. 2019

Society

“Day By Day²”

My role as a fundraiser for the Southwest Tech Foundation allows me the opportunity to meet many students in need in southwest Wisconsin. This past fall I met a young woman, Arleena, who had received a Charger Dream grant, a \$500 grant that is paid to third parties to help students get through a financial emergency. Our Giving Tuesday campaign was focused on the Charger Dream Fund and Arleena was kind enough to share her story with me so that I could tell others the impact of these grants.

Arleena and her family were victims of the historic Gays Mills flood in August with the Kickapoo River reaching a record-breaking 22 feet. Arleena and her finance, along with Arleena's two children were wise enough to move much of their large appliances and furniture out of their house before the water came into their house but unfortunately, their house had an extreme amount of water damage and while they have done a lot of work on it since the flood, it still isn't fit to live in and they won't know what, if any FEMA relief they will receive until this spring. This fall Arleena's family lived in a camper until November when they were able to move into a rental house. Now they pay rent along with continuing to pay their monthly mortgage on the house they can't live in.

Arleena left a lasting impression on me. She was a beautiful young mother, who was in a really tough situation but stayed so positive. I left that meeting wondering how I would have responded to this situation and wanting to do more to help Arleena.



When Brandon asked if my husband and I would participate in the S.P.A.R.K. program, I knew exactly how I wanted to use the gift. I had told my husband Arleena's story and he agreed that she would be a great recipient. We mailed her a card with the \$50 gift card along with \$50 that we gave her and a note that said, "We know 2018 has been a tough year, we want to help get 2019 off to a great start for you and your family." Use this in whatever way you wish. Happy New Year!" Arleena received the gift on New Year's Eve and in her thank you letter to us she said, "What a special surprise in my mailbox this morning! I was mentally budgeting out the next few months in my mind today- trying to figure out how tight things might get in the next few months. Then your card came in the mail! It was a blessing, encouragement, and a reminder of how we have gotten through the months since August 28, 2018. And how we will get through the months to come! We simply will! Thank you for helping 'get 2019 off to a great start' for me and my family!"

Thank you for allowing us the extreme pleasure of participating in this program. The feeling of making a small positive impact on someone's life brings us endless amounts of happiness!

- Joe & Kim
Belmont, WI



S.P.A.R.K.

Society

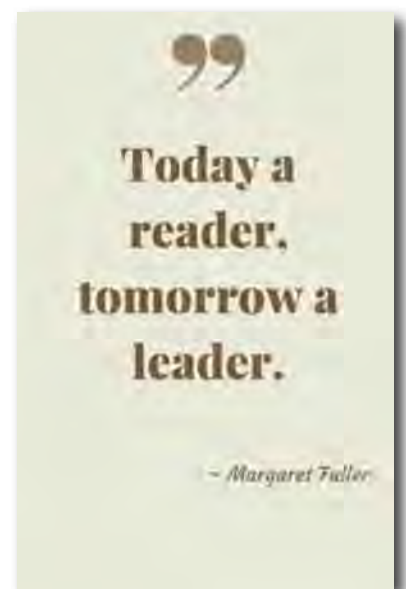
2019

“Once Upon A Time...³”

Both of us love to read and feel strongly about the role libraries play in a community. Libraries provide access to computers and books. They provide programs for adults and children. They promote literacy and the love of reading.



We recently attended a concert. A friend paid for the tickets. Rather than letting us reimburse him, he told us to pay it forward. So, we took our \$50 S.P.A.R.K. card and we each contributed an additional \$50. We donated that money to the Madison Public Library Foundation. Because an anonymous donor offered to match all donations made in December, our donation became \$300, which will help enable our libraries to continue to expand services to the residents of Madison.



- Bill & Gail
Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“Endless Potential”

Do the best you
can until you
know better.
Then when you
know better, do
better.

- Maya Angelou

Katie is a single mom with three school age children at home. I originally met Katie in another capacity through our church outreach. She is a bright, energetic and positive individual.

Over the past two years she has embarked on a new career path involving commission-only insurance sales. She is progressing in this journey but with an uneven income stream for her family as she builds her client base. She shared sales experiences as well as opportunities she's created to get in front of groups to educate them about insurance and it's place in their planning. This is my second opportunity to meet with Katie, and I believe I recognize significant potential. For my part, I had a genuine opportunity to share some of my experiences and relationships in the business community.

Bottom line, the S.P.A.R.K. program also gave me an opportunity and the affirmation to “Pay It Forward”.

- John & Susan
Burnett, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

Society

2019

“Restoring Kindness²”

Dear Jeff,

On behalf of the Spartan Peace Project and the students of McFarland High School, I want to thank you for your generous donation of \$200.00. The Spartan Peace Project is a school-wide campaign to promote empathy, teach courageous conversations, and call students to action. It is part of a district and community-wide Equity initiative to build empathy and understanding among the McFarland High School community.

Specifically, your donation will go towards our next project during Kindness Week, January 28 - February 1, 2019. The Spartan Peace Project is partnering with [Restoring Kindness](https://restoringkindness.com/get-started/) out of DeForest, WI, to call our students to action by “paying it forward”. Restoring Kindness has designed postcards with our logo, and your donation will pay for the printing of the postcards at a local printing company. Our hope is to print 1000 cards to distribute to our students and families. How it works, for example, is a student will buy a coffee, and then leave \$5.00 and a kindness card to purchase a coffee for the next person in line. That person will then take the card and hopefully do the same for someone else.

We believe this falls in line with the S.P.A.R.K. Society vision and will have a small individual impact that can reach far and wide!

Look for the “restoringkindness” cards in our community, and know that YOU helped make this event happen!!

With gratitude,

Anne Nichols
Associate Principal
McFarland High School



We brainstormed with Anne Nichols, Associate Principal at McFarland High School, to determine the best use of our S.P.A.R.K. The \$100 from Midwest Financial Group was matched by us resulting in a \$200 donation to the McFarland High School ‘Kindness Week’ event. The #Restoring Kindness movement <https://restoringkindness.com/get-started/> is dedicated to **‘Doing something for a stranger and expecting nothing in return.’** The donation was targeted as seed capital to ‘get things started’ with the purchase of 1,000 ‘Kindness Cards’ for students and McFarland businesses. They, in turn, will be expected to ‘pay it forward’ as the week ensues from Jan 28th through Feb 1st. Any remaining funds might be used toward creating a video highlighting students from all schools sharing their acts of kindness. We thought what could be more in keeping with S.P.A.R.K (Small Purposeful Act of Random Kindness).

- Jeff & Dana
McFarland, WI

All it takes is a spark.

“Home Sweet Home”

Throughout the past year I've been increasing aware of affordable housing issues in Madison. In retirement I've been able to attend city planning meetings and have seen first hand the difficulty to keep a roof over ones head. This problem has come close to home: a disabled cousin with an aging mother, a older women in the neighborhood on a fixed income and from a friend volunteering with Jewish Social Services about the difficulty of finding affordable housing for refugee immigrants. Both Lutheran and Jewish Social Services have assisted in refugee placement for decades in the community. Lutheran SS has needed to drop their program because of the lack of affordable housing in the area.

IN THIS HOUSE
WE ARE A FAMILY
LOVE EACH OTHER
BE HAPPY EVERY DAY
LAUGH A LOT
RESPECT ONE ANOTHER
USE KIND WORDS
ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH
SAY PLEASE & THANK YOU
NEVER GIVE UP
KEEP YOUR PROMISE
FORGIVE EVEN WHEN ITS HARD
BE TRUTHFUL
POSITIVE
GRATEFUL

The day I received the S.P.A.R.K. gift card I also received a request to assist a refugee mother and child that would be arriving in the city within the week. Opening my home at that time to these new arrivals was not possible. Bad timing. But it was hard to image what it would feel like to arrive in a country with limited language, money and homeless, just wanting a safe place for her young child, a toddler. A new start in a cold climate.

The S.P.A.R.K. gift was donated to Jewish Social Services with the specific request that it be used for refugee housing.

Please keep in mind that affordable housing is in great need in the area. With a stable home comes a stable family and community.

Thanks to Midwest for making it possible to contribute to the community at-large.

- Bette
Middleton, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

2019

Society

“Teach, Encourage, Instruct, Guide, & Inspire”



We gave our gift card to a teacher who teaches special needs children. One of her students had brain cancer earlier this year. He was in the hospital for a long time and Doctors said he was able to go back to school. The Doctors suggested some things he can work on and one of the items that will help him is a LEGO System, which is very expensive. The S.P.A.R.K. card helped pay for the LEGO System, a IQ Builder Learning Toys, and Barcaloo Building Bricks.

- Larry & Penny
Waunakee, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K

2019

Society

“Blessings in a Backpack³”

Our church partnered with our area churches with “Blessings in a Backpack” to help kids, identified by the school district, with food for the weekend. That program expanded to “Families in Transition”, or who are homeless and trying to find a place to live. We prepared boxes filled with non-perishable foods, basic daily care such as shampoo, tooth brush & tooth paste, etc. Boxes are provided to the police department and local library to distribute as recommended by the schools. We tripled our S.P.A.R.K. card and made a donation to this program. This will help with purchases for the boxes and provide to families in need.

- DeForest & Stevens Point, WI



All it takes is a spark.

S.P.A.R.K.

Society

2019

“Making Ends Meet²”

I got a late start to my S.P.A.R.K., and really began thinking about it over the holidays between Christmas and New Year. I began to talk with my two oldest kids about this amazing opportunity to be able to pay it forward with a random act of kindness – and I hate to say it, but they looked at me like I was speaking another language. They just couldn't understand what this meant, or why we might do this. All of their suggestions for what to do with the \$50 revolved around them. I knew then that the biggest takeaway from this opportunity would not be in what the random act of kindness might be, but in the lesson that I get to teach my children.

This sparked a number of conversations and brainstorming with my kids about how we could use the money to help someone else. Together we came up with a number of different ideas, such as paying negative balances on school lunch, buying hats and mittens for the school to have on hand for kids in need, and putting together care packages for seniors in assisted living. I then learned that a connection of mine who works for the government is at risk of not being paid soon due to the shutdown (the state is helping to bridge the gap currently). This connection is a single father of two girls and with no other income his family would be seriously affected. I decided to give my card to this person, who has said that in the event his pay is not affected, he will give it to a veteran in need that he works with. However, the story does not end there.

YOU DON'T MEET PEOPLE BY ACCIDENT.

Together with my boys, we have decided that they will use a portion of their Christmas money to buy hats and mittens for their school to give out as needed. This was a great opportunity to help my children understand how fortunate they are and that through small acts, we can help others in a big way.

Thank you for this opportunity.

- Madison, WI



All it takes is a spark.

“No Kindness Is Ever Wasted”

Upon being informed that we had received the honor from the S.P.A.R.K. Society, we contacted the Guidance Counselor at the Mount Horeb School system as Mount Horeb has experienced a growth in our schools over the past few years of families who are in need of various forms of help.

The Guidance Counselor, in turn, made the connection with the Mount Horeb School's Social Worker, who had an over-view of the students in our system and would have the knowledge of who would benefit in having this award be shared with a student and their family.

The agreed upon decision was to provide this to a family of a single mother, teen-age son, and young child. Due to the fact that the family does not own a vehicle, the Social Worker volunteered to drive them to the local grocery store and assist them in choices of food items to utilize the gift card that we had purchased there.

As the recipients of being able to dispense this award, we received heartfelt appreciation for being chosen to locate and make a difference for a local family (anonymously) with the assistance of respected employees of our school system.

- Mike & Sally
Mount Horeb, WI

Greetings from the English Language Learners Department!

Sorry this letter comes to you so late. I was thrilled to take the parent of one of our ELL students shopping at Miller's right after Christmas with the generous gift of \$50 you offered them. I was involved as they currently have no transportation and live many miles out of town. They were most grateful and happy to have this sudden opportunity to stock up on essentials like potatoes, onions, carrots, green vegetables and fresh fruit along with cooking oil and butter. They decided to hold on to a chunk of the money on the card to purchase meat at a later date, a sort of an insurance program for them.

Gifts like this can make a huge impact in the lives of some very hardworking and worthy people. They were truly touched by the anonymity of the gift as well.

Rebecca Dwyer

French and ELL

Mount Horeb Area School District



All it takes is a spark.

“Making a Difference”



The check was presented to Mary in the St. Thomas Aquinas Parish office to forward to the St. Vincent DePaul Conference. She was grateful for the gift and said SVDP would be "thrilled" to receive it. Thank you for making this gift possible.

May God bless the people at Midwest Financial Group!

- Nat & Debbie
Middleton, WI



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www.sparkociety.net

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