

Arlington junior carries on family tradition of giving

by Kate Goldsmith

When Alexa Peruffo of Poughkeepsie turned 16 this past spring, she chose to forego presents from her friends. Instead, she asked them to contribute recreational items for youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties who live in Astor Services for Children and Families' residences in Rhinebeck.

Her friends answered the call in a very big way, to the tune of 33 soccer balls, 22 puzzles, 60 beach towels, 14 footballs, 11 basketballs, 11 softball, four decks of cards, two jump ropes and other goods, along with more than \$500 in cash donations.

"Alexa said nothing else crossed her mind but doing what she did," said Sonia Barnes-Moorhead, executive vice president of The Children's Foundation of Astor. "She said she's so fortunate and she has so much, there is nothing that she needed."

Alexa, a junior at Arlington High School, was inspired by older sister Heather, who celebrated her Sweet 16 in a like fashion seven years earlier.

"I have always viewed my sister as my biggest role model, and what she has done in her life has always had a huge impact on my actions," said Alexa, who was 9 at the time of her sister's party. "I remember very few details of the actual Sweet 16 event for my sister, but I do remember her donation and how her friends were so surprised but so generous for children they didn't even know. This idea had a great impact on me as a child. Beyond her donation itself was a group of kids who banded together to donate items for a cause. My sister was inspiring others to think above themselves and help others."

Alexa and Heather's philanthropic actions are reflections of lessons their parents have taught by example.

"My parents have always instilled the

"Going to the Astor Home was an incredibly inspiring experience. To be able to see where my donations were going and to see how much care and time was put into the well-being of these kids was life-changing," she said. "Donating to a cause and seeing the cause firsthand are very different. I personally did not get the chance to meet any of the children, but I was able to see them learning and being taken care of in a natural environment, and I could not believe the time and care taken to ensure the safety and enjoyment of these kids."

Alexa said she was moved to tears by a thank-you card she received from the children.

"I could feel the kids' joy and gratitude in their words and I knew that this feeling was unlike any other I had felt before," she said. "I was inspired by children who I had never met; kids who had many of their own issues took the time to thank me for a donation that took very little work on my part. I couldn't wait to share this response with my generous friends and greatly enjoyed showing them the card and explaining my experience and seeing their responses. My friends were just as surprised as I was at how much of a difference some sports equipment, something we take for granted, can make."

"You should have seen them [residents] over the summer! They were so ecstatic," said Barnes-Moorhead. "Both the children and staff who work with the children are very thankful. They [kids] feel very special in receiving these items."

The Peruffo family donates regularly to various local and international charities, Alexa said, participating in charity walks, food and clothes drives, and other events.

"We also work with the St. Vincent De Paul Society through our church as well as Operation Christmas Child, where we donate boxes of essentials to children in poor countries," said Alexa. "My fondest memory of our participation in charitable



Arlington High School junior Alexa Peruffo recently donated a large amount of recreational items and \$500 cash to Astor Services for Children and Families in Rhinebeck. In lieu of gifts for Alexa's Sweet 16 party this spring, she asked her friends to donate these items, which she delivered herself to Astor Services. Courtesy photo

children were aware of "what's going on in our world in order to better understand where help is needed."

"As I have seen both of my older siblings head off to college, they have been encouraged to not only do what they love but to make sure that they do their job for more than themselves," she said. "When you work, you should not just work for the most money. Work for what you believe in and make sure that somehow you can help another's life."

Anyone interested in following Alexa's example is invited to contact Barnes-

Moorhead at (845) 871-1117 or smoorhead@astorservices.org.

Astor Services for Children and Families serves more than 8,000 in the community including "some of the poorest kids, and their needs are very high," said Barnes-Moorhead.

"We do get a lot of support from government grants, but want to engage more with the community, and we need the community's help with items like this," she said, noting that Astor's Adopt a Family program under way for the holiday season. Visit astorservices.org for more information.

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