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Advance

Four Girls For Families

Bellport girls raise funds for Cambodia on Saturday

By LINDA LEUZZI

Joanne Specht never thought her family's trip to Cambodia in January would result in an organization started by her two daughters and their friends that would raise funding for water filtration systems.

But that's what happened.

Stop by 14 Bellport Lane on Saturday, Aug. 13 from noon to 6 p.m. The Four Girls for Families, 11-year-old Rae and 8-year-old Emmy Specht and their friends 10-year-old Clara Walker and 11-year-old Maddie Joinnides will tell you all about it. Make sure you go; they'll only be there for one day.

The premise began with a holiday vacation.

Specht's husband works in the toy business and travels to Hong Kong. "We travel with him at Christmas and spend a week in Asia on vacation," Specht said of Rae, Emmy and 5-year-old Sam. "We wanted to go to Cambodia because of the Angkor temples." One of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia, Angkor is a UNESCO Heritage Centre site and contains the remains of Khmer Empire capitals from the 9 to the 15th centuries. The family stayed in Siem Reap, a city close to the Angkor temples.

"The hotels are nice," Specht said. "But you only need to travel one mile and you see the rural villages with tiny huts and no running water. Their sanitation system is in the lake." The area once had a sophisticated



Four Girls for Families (left to right) Maddie Joinnides, Clara Walker, Rae Specht and Emily Specht will be at 14 Bellport Lane this weekend selling gift items to raise funds for water filtration systems for Cambodia.

Photo courtesy of the Specht family

water infrastructure but it was destroyed during the Vietnam War and Pol Pot's infamous tenure. "Our children were moved by the people," she said. "They are gentle and kind, but they have nothing. Every 10 seconds they wanted to hand out dollars in the street."

After returning home, the family researched the country's biggest problems and safe drinking water emerged. "NPR recently had a segment on this," Specht said. "It was also detailed on United Nations and UNICEF websites. Bill and Melinda Gates are involved with this water filtration system."

In March, Rae and Emmy Specht talked to their best friends, Clara Walker and Maddie Joinnides. They brainstormed and decided to form a charity. It took three trips to Riverhead to the county clerk's office to establish it and Four Girls For Families emerged. They all wrote their brochure; Joanne Specht laid it out on a computer. The girls' thinking was, a home water filtration system made in Cambodia costs around \$8; let's purchase as many as we can.

They sold hand made jewelry, T-shirts, fabric handbags, journals, prints of paintings they made and cards at the Artists on the Lane and Bellport Day events. Former Bellport trustee Sherry Binnington was among the customers. "I purchased the note cards," she said. "They made T-shirts, my granddaughter got earrings. I know they were selling bracelets and I think it's a wonderful cause."

Phil Grucci who owns the building where the girls are selling their wares this weekend was impressed with their forthrightness. "They reached out to us," he said. "The girls took down the phone number under the For Rent sign and called us for Bellport Day." The email they sent was so endearing, "we said, 'yes' come get the keys," he said. "Then they asked if they could do it again." They got it gratis, thanks to the Gruccis.

They've already raised \$4,500 at this point. They'd like to increase the amount to \$8,000 so they can help 1,000 families (they started with a goal of 200 families). The Specht family will return to Cambodia again in January and is arranging for a water filtration company there to make them as well as delivery trucks and an interpreter so they can personally hand over a water filtration system to families in villages. "So many kids are volunteering to help," said Joanne Specht. "Now people are emailing us to join forces." ■



The Four Girls for Families helpers and organizers on Bellport Day. In the back row: Rae Specht is second from left in the back row, Maddie Joinnides is fourth from left, and Clara Walker is last. Emily Specht is fourth from left in the front row.

Photo courtesy of the Specht family