



Called to

IN OUR EIGHTH ANNUAL WEBMD HEALTH HEROES TRIBUTE, WE HONOR AMERICANS WHO ARE DOING EXTRAORDINARY THINGS FOR THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THE NATION. BY SUSAN DAVIS

Good Sport

At age 17, **Simone Bernstein** noticed that the 8-year-old twins on her block—both of whom had autism—were fascinated with her tennis racket. She asked their parents if she could give the boys tennis lessons; the parents leapt at the chance, saying children with autism have few social and recreational opportunities. That inspired Bernstein to set up sports clinics, led by high school and college athlete volunteers, to help children with mild to moderate disabilities develop skills and get fit.

The project begun in Bernstein's hometown of St. Louis went national last year when she established VolunTEENnation.org, which has connected 14,000 teens with volunteer opportunities, mostly in sports clinics for children with autism. This year, more than 500 children participated in the clinics in 12 cities nationwide.

Bernstein, an undergrad at St. Bonaventure University who will attend the George Washington University School of Medicine, also created a network of 50 community gardens that have produced 15,000 pounds of fresh produce for local food banks. "I'm passionate about this work," says Bernstein, 21, who hopes to continue working for children in either the government or nonprofit sector when she gets her medical degree. "Volunteering helps me understand more about the community. It is so gratifying to get a college education and then use it to assist others."

SCOTT GABLE



Care

Fresh Idea

Barbi Haase, a mother of six, is serious about healthy eating. "I love to see people really excited about eating produce," says Haase, 49, founder of The Noisy Rabbit, a Greenville, S.C., food co-op that sells baskets of fresh fruits and veggies at affordable prices.

Haase's homeschooled children, who range in age from 10 to 21, pitch in by delivering bulk produce to local "branches," where volunteers divide it into baskets for distribution to more than 700 families in the area. (Subscribers can also arrange to have produce delivered to their workplaces.)

The Noisy Rabbit encourages customers to "build fellowship and community around food" when they gather to pick up their baskets, Haase says. The business also provides menu ideas, shopping lists, and cooking tips. "It doesn't matter if you're saving money on healthy food if you're not eating it," Haase says. "So we help people learn how to use their produce."

Noisy Rabbit volunteers give back by putting extra produce in donation baskets for needy families. At Thanksgiving, volunteers fill the baskets with traditional holiday produce, a turkey, and homemade desserts.

"This is something that is very dear to our hearts: helping people who are in need—and encouraging people to see that need," Haase says.

GREGORY MILLER





Team Effort

Emily Whitehead was just 5 when she developed troubling symptoms, including nosebleeds, bruising, and knee pain. Her doctor diagnosed her with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common type of blood cancer—and one that is 85% curable. “They told us it was a ‘garden variety’ cancer in the beginning,” says her father, Tom Whitehead. “But from the beginning, things didn’t go the way they should have.”

Emily went into remission after chemotherapy but relapsed twice, making her ineligible for a bone marrow transplant. Then in 2012, with Emily just days from kidney failure, **Stephen A. Grupp, MD, PhD**, of the Children’s Hospital in Philadelphia, told the Whiteheads of a clinical trial in which doctors would genetically engineer Emily’s own infection-fighting T cells to fight the cancer cells.

Only three adults had received the treatment—no children. It nearly killed Emily; at one point, she was given a one in 1,000 chance of surviving. But Grupp’s team found a drug to stop her body’s adverse reaction, and when Emily awoke from a two-week coma, her cancer was gone.

Emily is now 8 and healthy. Grupp has treated 17 more children with the procedure (80% of whom are in remission). Emily’s family has twice traveled to Washington, D.C., with her oncologists to urge legislators to fund pediatric cancer research, and they have helped Children’s raise money for its cancer programs. “We are so grateful to these doctors who spend their lives curing cancer,” Whitehead says.

LEFT: COLIN LENTON; RIGHT: BROOKS KRAFT



Service Call

When **Lee Morgan, DVM**, heard about a police dog that was euthanized because the officers couldn’t pay for his surgery, he knew he’d found his mission. The officers “were devastated,” says Morgan, 48, who owns Georgetown Veterinary Hospital in Washington, D.C. “I vowed then that no service dog should die for lack of money.”

In 2008, Morgan’s foundation raised \$20,000 for a mobile veterinary unit for the D.C. police department’s K-9 unit, so injured police dogs could be treated in the field. He also provides no-cost care to guide dogs. “The relationship between working dogs and their owners exemplifies the potential of the human-animal bond,” Morgan says. “It is humbling to be able to support that.”

Morgan once famously treated a Marine Corps bomb-sniffing dog named Lex, who survived a grenade blast in Iraq that killed his handler, Cpl. Dustin Lee. Lex’s war injuries led to severe arthritis and other mobility problems. In 2010, Morgan’s groundbreaking stem cell treatment helped to regenerate some of Lex’s cartilage and nerve function, which allowed him to “walk, play, everything,” Morgan says. Lex spent his remaining years with Lee’s parents in Mississippi, where he died in 2012.

“It was so rewarding to help this dog get some good years,” Morgan says, “and to help the parents maintain this last bond with their son.”

