

Kendall kids lend a hand (and shovels)

Firefighters host pizza party for kids who cleared snow from fire hydrants

By Brian Quinn and Mark Gutman

The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

A late January snow day turned into a demonstration of community spirit in the Orleans County town of Kendall.

The Kendall Fire Department was looking for a simple and fun way to keep kids engaged while also helping the community. What began as a small idea quickly turned into an inspiring display of community pride, service, and teamwork.

The department announced a contest over its Facebook page on Jan. 26 inviting children to shovel out a fire hydrant or a neighbor's driveway for a chance to win a ride to school on a Kendall fire truck. After shoveling, the kids had to have pictures taken and sent to the Kendall Fire Department.

Fire Chief Randy Davis said the department thought four or five kids might send in photos. They got more than 40.

"All of a sudden it took off," he said. "Being in a small town, you get all the families together and all the kids have the day off. It was a good turnout and we're very appreciative."

Most of the kids who participated were elementary school students. A couple of high school students shoveled out hydrants as well.

"Helping others is at the core of what we do," Kendall Fire Department Capt. James Fox said. "But watching these young kids brave the cold, take initiative and help ensure fire hydrants were accessible was truly special."

"Clearing hydrants means that if a home or a neighbor's house were to catch fire, firefighters can access water quickly when every second matters," he continued. "That level of awareness and selflessness at such a young age was one of our proudest moments."

To thank everyone who participated, the Kendall Fire Department hosted a pizza party on Feb. 3.

Jeffrey Lutes, 9, a fourth-grader, shoveled snow away from a hydrant near his home on Petersmith Road on Jan. 26.

"It was hard. I had a foot of snow up here," Jeffrey said, pointing down to the bottom of his coat. "It took about, like, 30 minutes to get through everything."

Jeffrey said how he feels about shoveling depends on the temperature outside.

"If it's not too cold, I'll go out and shovel, but if it's super-cold, I won't," he said.

The high temperature on Jan. 26 was in the teens.

Emmalyn Grabelle, 10, a fifth grader, cleared a hydrant near her home on Smith Drive. She said she shoveled for about 20 minutes to get rid of the snow around the hydrant.

"It tired me out a little bit," she said. "The snow pile put a barrier, so I had to dig through the barrier."

The pizza party that followed was a good reward, said several of the kids who participated.

"I think it's a really good award, because we all shoveled. We dedicate our time to go and (shovel)," said Emmalyn.

Jeffrey said the pizza "was really good."

Besides pizza, which was donated by J&M Repair in Holley, there was ice cream donated by Partyka Farms in Kendall, fried dough donated by Hamlin Pizza Shack in Hamlin, and pop for the children and their families.

During the pizza party, the department also drew the names of the winners who will receive a ride to school on a Kendall fire truck. Originally one winner was planned but ultimately four were picked. Jeffrey Lutes was chosen along with fifth-grader Presley Cole, 10, second-grader Brantley Cole, 7, and first-grader Nora Rasmussen, 7.

Nora said she's been in a fire truck before.

"They're just really cool and you get to see how they work," she said.

Fox, the fire department captain, said the ride is being planned for March.

Kendall Elementary School Principal Kevin Watson said the school will talk about doing this again and use its student messaging service to reach more students as not all families are using Facebook.

"It was almost like a viral thing that happened with all this, so it was really cool," he said.

Watson said the shoveling and pizza party might lead to other ways the school can be associated with the fire department or other organizations locally.

"I love seeing all these kids here act as leaders in the community," Watson said.

"Predominantly, they were elementary school students that got the message and went outside and braved the cold. Some of them did multiple hydrants. It was just such a cool thing for me to be home on a snow day and go to Facebook and see all those pictures popping up on the fire department (page)."

Deputy Chief Mike Cole said the idea grew out of a group text discussion about what to do to get kids involved and grew from there.

"I like to keep the kids involved in the fire department," said Davis, the fire chief. "In the fire service, we're getting older. We need to start getting the youth more involved in the fire department and show them what we do."

Davis said he drove around the community that day and helped some student shovel hydrant and explained the need to clear snow 3 feet away on each side so firefighters would have room to get their hoses attached. He saw the contest as a way to involve kids in the community and educate them about the fire service.

Fox said the contest delivered important lessons about service and community.

"In a time when there can be so much division, the Kendall community once again showed what makes our town special," Fox said. "This event was a powerful reminder that we are one school, one community, and one family."



Kendall Fire Department Photo

A youngster poses with the path he cleared to a fire hydrant in Kendall.



Kendall Fire Department Photo

A youngster poses with a hydrant she cleared in Kendall.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Kendall Fire Department Chief Randy Davis thanks all the kids for their help with clearing the snow away from fire hydrants.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Nicholas Vallejo, 10, enjoys pizza during A Feb. 3 pizza party at the Kendall Fire Department to thank students who had helped clear snow from fire hydrants in the town.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Piper Soptelean 7, enjoys pizza on Feb. 3 at the Kendall Fire Department.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Kendall Fire Chief Randy Davis, right, thanks the children who will get a fire truck ride to school. They are, from left, Jeffrey Lutes, 9, Presley Cole, 10, Brantley Cole, 7, and Nora Rasmusson, 7.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Kendall Fire Department EMT Stephany Holland was busy serving fried dough Feb. 3 during a pizza party to thank children who shoveled out fire hydrants during a snow day in the town of Kendall.



Mark Gutman/The (Batavia, N.Y.) Daily News

Adeline Jung, 6, and her father, Kyle Jung, go back up for seconds during a Feb. 3 pizza party at the Kendall Fire Department that thanked area children who helped clear snow from fire hydrants in the town of Jan. 26.