

Youngster raises Pennies for Peanut Butter

Youngster sparks initiative to provide peanut butter

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Preston Simon likes peanut butter so much that he has a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich every day for lunch.

So, the 7-year-old was rather surprised to learn that some local children his age have never tasted peanut butter, once a staple for many school-age children.

“I was really sad. I really wanted to help them,” he said.

And he has through a Pennies for Peanut Butter campaign he launched in the spring.

He got the idea after his grandmother had spoken to Lisa Nuccetelli, executive director of the Greater Washington County Food Bank, who said she hoped to unveil a program similar to that operated by the Pittsburgh Food Bank in the next fiscal year.

“This time last year, the price of peanut butter went through the roof,” Nuccetelli said. “Peanut butter companies were no longer selling as much” because the expense was just too much for low-income families to afford.

Enter Preston, who pitched his idea to the congregation at Third United Presbyterian Church in Washington during a Sunday worship service.

The congregation apparently liked what it heard. On the first run to the food bank, Preston delivered 150 jars of peanut butter, 95 of which he and his mother purchased with the pennies that were collected. The other jars of peanut butter were donated.

“Some were donating peanut butter/jelly. I never saw this jelly mixed in with peanut butter,” said Preston, son of Brian and Heidi Simon of Washington.

Heidi helped Preston promote his project, reaching out to friends and family through Facebook.

“I had friends sending checks in the mail. We even got a check from New Mexico,” Heidi said. “Our friends stepped up.”

So, too, did kids and families at the church. Pennies for Peanut Butter became the mission of the church’s vacation Bible school in June.

“It was so amazing,” Heidi said. “The kids really took to this. They understand.”

Preston counted pennies, and he also helped his mother shop for the peanut butter. And on occasion, their cart full of peanut butter admittedly drew plenty of stares and a few questions.

But that was OK. By the time the official campaign ended, the Simons had delivered 310 jars of peanut butter to the food bank.

“They just skyrocketed with it,” Nuccetelli said. “In talking with Preston’s grandmother, we said some people just throw peanut butter in their buggy and don’t think twice about it. But when it costs \$4 or \$5 a jar ... some people only have \$4 or \$5.”

Nuccetelli said the food bank tries to provide something that is high in protein for families. If peanut butter isn’t readily available, tuna fish is substituted. The food bank helps an average of 4,500 families a month. Last year, it helped feed more than 6,000 households.

Preston and members of Third United Presbyterian have already started their next project for the food bank: hygiene products and cereal.

“We want to give them what they need,” Heidi said.

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