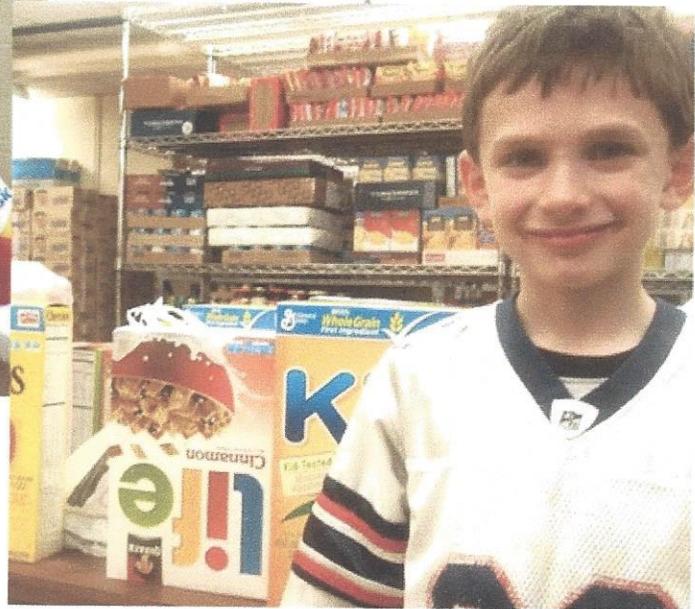




Ethan Korb, 11, of Saukeville gave up birthday gifts from friends for donations to the Wisconsin Humane Society.



Benjamin Larson, 8, of Bay View asked his birthday guests to donate cereal for the Riverwest Food Pantry.

Birthday party with a purpose

BY MARY RAEBEL

"I don't know what it is about this generation, but they are amazing!"

Angela Speed, spokeswoman for the Wisconsin Humane Society, marvels at the young philanthropists who come through the door. "They say they just had a birthday party and instead of asking for gifts, they collected donations for the animals. There are some kids who do it two and three years in a row!"

Make giving fun

For the past three birthdays, Ethan Korb, 11, of Saukeville has given up a potential roomful of presents in exchange for a large load of donations for the Humane Society. "I normally don't think about how I'm losing stuff," he says. "I just think about how I'm helping the dogs and cats and other animals."

Ethan and his family have figured out how to make giving fun—for a lot of kids. They rent out the historic Rivoli Theater in Cedarburg and invite Ethan's whole class for a party, including parents and siblings, the teachers and their kids, and other friends.

Ethan says his friends think it's a pretty cool idea. "It is probably

easier to bring things to the party from the wish list at the Humane Society instead of having to ask me what I want," he says. "They also like that I invite everyone in the classroom so no one gets left out."

Ethan's mom, Raquel, says they live on a hobby farm and care for animals, so choosing to support the Humane Society seemed only natural. She says the whole family came up with the idea together.

"My husband, Todd, and I try to find a balance in our life," she says. "We realize we really don't need more stuff that comes with birthday parties."

Create a giving tradition

Eight-year-old Benjamin Larson of Bay View figures he really doesn't need more stuff either. Plus, giving has become a Larson family tradition. Together they volunteer at the Riverwest Food Pantry in Milwaukee. Because of that experience, Benjamin asked his friends for boxes of cereal instead of birthday presents.

"I felt like God was calling me to be nice to other kids and live my life for other people," says Benjamin. "I just wanted the food pantry to have

more food to give to more people."

"Benjamin has a very generous heart so we didn't need to convince him to do this," says his mom, Sara. "It's just part of who we are as a family and who he is as a person."

Volunteering on a regular basis has helped Benjamin see that it's his responsibility to help however he can, she says.

Benjamin says he got to hand out the cereal himself when he volunteered at the pantry. "It just made me happy that this cereal was from my friends."

Between 500 and 1000 people receive emergency food assistance each month from the Riverwest Food Pantry. Director Vincent Noth says about one third of their clients are children and over half of the food stamp recipients are under the age of 21. Those are facts, he says, that hit home to parents and children.

Since many kids today get birthday gifts from parents and other relatives, Noth suggests collecting donations at a kids' party might be an option more children are willing to consider. ■

A party with a purpose is about having fun with friends and doing something good together. Here are a few ideas:

- 1. Party with the animals:** The Wisconsin Humane Society hosts birthday parties nearly every weekend, and 100 percent of the proceeds help provide care for the animals. wihumane.org/for-kids
- 2. Gift donations:** Throw a regular party but ask the guests to bring a donation instead of a gift. It could be books for the hospital or mittens for a homeless shelter. Local food pantries often need birthday party items like cake mix and canned frosting so a child in need can celebrate a birthday, too.
- 3. Fun run/walk:** Gather friends and family, and get active for a cause. Create your own T-shirts and wear them as a team.
- 4. Crafting kindness:** Pull out the art supplies and ask party guests to create a card and write a greeting for residents of a nursing home, or a teacher, or a relative—just because.
- 5. Random acts of green:** Guests can decorate terra-cotta pots and plant some flowers; then share with neighbors.