

10,000 People Receive a Thanksgiving Dinner, and a Message of Hope

On Saturday, November 23rd, over 700 volunteers from the Basket Brigade of Suburban Chicago packed and personally delivered 2,000 complete Thanksgiving dinners to families-in-need all around the Chicago suburbs. Each Thanksgiving basket feeds a family of five, and includes a turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, gravy, rolls, corn, marshmallows, cranberries, vegetables, mac and cheese, and even a pumpkin pie for dessert.

In its fifth year, the Basket Brigade of Suburban Chicago was founded by Brian and Cherish Walsh with the mission “to put the GIVING back into Thanksgiving.” Founded in memory of Brian’s mother, Lorraine M. Walsh, the Basket Brigade of Suburban Chicago combines aspects of fundraising and volunteerism along with personal growth.

“We could not deliver all of these meals without the generosity of our sponsors, the support of the local community, and the hard work of our volunteers and drivers,” says Brian.

Basket Brigade Assembly Day is always the Saturday before Thanksgiving, so that the meal arrives in plenty of time for the families receiving them to make their plans without the stress of trying to figure out how to pay for it all. The event was held at Tefft Middle School where the volunteers assisted in packaging the meals and were then provided with the addresses of families-in-need who were nominated by a variety of sources including private nominations on the Basket Brigade’s website as well as names provided by other local nonprofits, churches, daycares, schools and other social service organizations.

“Each basket contains enough food to feed a family of five,” says Basket Brigade Treasurer, Eric Hartmann, “and the thought that we are literally bringing Thanksgiving to ten thousand people in our local area brings a tear to my eye.”

“Another inspirational part of the process,” says Brian Walsh, “that we focus on is the *growth of the giver*, as our volunteers are personally delivering the meals to the families-in-need. The impact of seeing how their volunteering is *directly* impacting the lives of these families-in-need is immeasurable.”

All nominations are absolutely confidential, and each basket contains a note stating that “*This comes to you from someone who cares about you. All we ask is that you take care of yourself well enough to be able to do this for someone else someday,*” which is written in both English and Spanish. Also included in the box are handmade coloring pages and notes from the children of the volunteers.

“We really tried to make the overall experience of the box be both functional and inspirational,” says co-founder Cherish Walsh, “and we definitely want our kids to play a big role in that, so we came up with the coloring pages that are included in the box, and we’ve often heard from our recipients that the coloring page was their favorite part of the basket.”

The Walshes and their team spend several months planning, fundraising, organizing and finding the recipients. “We work closely with our communities to find the volunteers and to solicit the necessary donations, both private and corporate,” said Brian Walsh, “we have also been able to partner up with many cool organizations, nonprofits, and civic organizations to identify families–in-need. It is really a team effort.”

“The whole process is an emotional and uplifting one,” says Cherish Walsh, “and the stories and the notes of thanks that we receive from the recipients, and the reports we receive back from the drivers of the joy they witness, the gratitude, the impact, sometimes people literally jumping for joy is truly inspirational.”

“The message that we strive to pass along to our volunteers, our children, and the community,” concludes Brian Walsh, “is that **the secret to LIVING is GIVING.**”

The Basket Brigade of Suburban Chicago is based entirely on the kindness and generosity of our donors and corporate sponsors. Special thanks to this year’s Premier Sponsors including Sevan Multi-Site Solutions, General Iron Industries, Allegra Palatine, and State Farm.

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The Basket Brigade of Suburban Chicago is a 501 (c)(3),
a dba of The Lorraine M. Walsh Memorial Foundation.

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Website: www.basketbrigade.net
Facebook: www.facebook.com/basketbrigadesuburbanchicago/
Video: <https://youtu.be/AzTUOLuEgYQ>
Phones: Brian Walsh, founder (847) 275-9055
Cherish Walsh, co-founder (847) 287-9055

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