

THE OUTLOOK

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Celebrating 30 years!

McFarland Newsletter

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

We are delighted to recognize Samantha Richards for her outstanding commitment to volunteerism with a variety of community projects in the McFarland area, including the Adopt-a-Playground project during the summer of 2021. Samantha embraces volunteerism as a family affair and seeks out opportunities to contribute to community service with her husband, Travis and two children, Riley (12) and Maverick (6). Samantha heard about the Adopt-a-Playground opportunity and signed up for summertime shift to tend to her neighborhood playground located in Egner Park. Her family has a regular routine of an evening walk or bike ride to reconnect and share about their day together. Their daily sojourns expanded to include a stop at the playground to pick up trash and pull weeds. The children would enthusiastically assist and then eventually drift to playing on the equipment to cap off the visit. Samantha was eager to support the playground with some elbow grease as she values the Village of McFarland practices to avoid chemical



SAMANTHA WITH HER TWO CHILDREN AT EGNER PARK.

applications in playground areas where young children are engaged. She hopes her children will experience how even small acts of volunteerism can make an important impact in the community.

Samantha has pitched in for beautification efforts on a larger scale too. She has organized a crew for the Adopt-a-Highway Program and tends 1.7 miles of Highway 51 between McFarland and Stoughton. She coordinates clean up events three times per year in on the designated stretch of roadway. The most recent trash pick-up yielded 14 large bags of trash.

She has a knack for thinking out of the box too. During a trip to the grocery store in February, Samantha was dismayed to see rows of Valentine's cards marked for clearance. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many school children were not going to be participating in annual classroom parties to exchange cards with classmates. Rather than viewing this as another painful example of missed opportunities, Samantha created the "Spread the Love Project." Samantha quickly got the word out and sourced Valentine's cards created by community members to be collected and distributed to senior citizens. The idea took hold and she received over 900 Valentine's cards from children and families in McFarland and throughout the state of Wisconsin, well beyond her goal of 500 cards. Samantha coordinated distribution of the Valentines to older adults in the community who receive

Meals on Wheels through McFarland Senior Outreach, as well as seniors residing at McFarland Villa, Williamstown Bay, The Homestead, and Skaalen Nursing Home in Stoughton. This gesture brought joy to many older adults during a bleak winter. The work of creating the cards had benefits for the volunteers too. Samantha believes that volunteering time for others is a joyful experience in and of itself resulting in, "a feeling that money can't buy."

Samantha was raised in the Racine area and moved to McFarland with her family six years ago where they are putting down roots. She is so happy to have found a family-friendly community and she embraces the village as her home. In August of 2021 she was crowned Mrs. Dane County and next April she will be competing for the Mrs. Wisconsin title. A cornerstone of her work with the program is a dedicated commitment to community service in McFarland and throughout Dane County. She has been leading by example and has embraced opportunities for her children to participate and make a difference. Most importantly, she believes, "the act of volunteering develops important foundational values of kindness and care for others that she hopes her children will carry throughout their lives."

If you are looking for family-friendly volunteer opportunities, reach out to Katie Gletty-Syoen at the McFarland Volunteer Program at 608-838-7117 or katie.gletty-syoen@mcfarland.wi.us

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