



Goodness of America

It's About Time!

A community in Tampa, Florida, came together to help a homeless couple have a fairytale wedding that they will never forget.

Today.com reported that it all began when Evelyn and Rocky Barlett were discovered living in the woods last year by Officer Dan McDonald. The couple had been together for a long time and wanted to get married, but could not scrape together the money for a marriage license, as they have been homeless for three years. "We've been together for 22 years and believe it or not, we've never had enough money to get the license in all those years," Evelyn Barlett told Today.com.

When the couple shared their story with Officer McDonald, he was immediately sympathetic. The cost of a marriage license in Florida is \$93, and Officer McDonald saw to it that they had enough funds to obtain the license.

But the story does not end there. A local newspaper published a story about the couple in an effort to spread word about the couple's upcoming nuptials. The response from the local community was immediate, with local businesses reaching out to the couple to offer their wedding services for free.

When staff at Cross Creek Ranch, an all-inclusive wedding venue, heard Evelyn and Rocky's story, they decided they were going to do all they could to give the couple a dream wedding. "We've never donated a wedding before, but when I called the vendors we work with, I couldn't even get the full story out before they were jumping at the opportunity to offer their services at no charge," Nancy Spooner, director of weddings at Cross Creek Ranch, told Today.com.

Before long, a dress was donated for use by Evelyn and a tux was donated for Rocky, in addition to flowers and food and drink for all the guests. The total donated cost of the April 1 wedding was approximately \$20,000.

The couple was surprised further when after their wedding, they were handed the keys to a duplex in northern Tampa as part of a homeless assistance program. Unbeknownst to them, Officer McDonald placed them on a waiting list for temporary housing, which came through just in time to surprise them at the wedding. Evelyn and Rocky were astounded by the show of support from the community. "This is a dream come true, and everybody that did all this and these girls and everything," Evelyn said. "It's just been a dream come true. No one's ever did this for me and Rocky."

Loads of Love

Samuel Van De Cruze used his laundromat in Queens, New York, to help those in need. He washed thousands of pounds of laundry for 75 homeless families over the course of a few days, saving those families approximately \$5,000.

The Huffington Post reported that between March 28 and March 31, Van De Cruze washed 5,000 pounds of laundry for residents at The Landing, a nearby homeless shelter run by the non-profit group CAMBA.

Van De Cruze decided to offer his services as an Easter gift to his community, explained Elizabeth Abdur-Raheem, senior program manager at The Landing. "These kind of heartfelt and thoughtful



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gestures are why we are so grateful for the warm welcome we've received from the East Elmhurst community," Abdur-Raheem said.

Van De Cruze's efforts included picking up the loads of laundry and dropping them off after the clothes were washed, dried, and folded. He stated that his faith inspired him to do it. "As a Christian, I've been taught to do good works," he told the Huffington Post. "During my devotions one morning, the thought came to me to do this."

"Clean clothes and bedding are necessities — almost as important as food and shelter," Van De Cruze said. "People need clean clothes to function and to be healthy."

Residents at The Landing were grateful for Van De Cruze's kind gesture. "We had to save as much money as we could for food, travel, diapers and other necessities," said Amber, a resident of The Landing. "I was washing our clothes in the bathtub to save laundry money." "I am so grateful for the burden that this lifted — you feel like you are a little bit more of a 'somebody' when you are wearing clean clothes," she added.

Be Bold, Be Brave, Go Bald

On March 16, nine-year-old Marlee Pack learned that she is surrounded by some wonderful friends. To show solidarity with Marlee, who had been diagnosed with cancer last spring, 86 teachers and students from Meridian Elementary School in Broomfield, Colorado, shaved their heads.

ABC News reported that Marlee was diagnosed with alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma — a cancer of soft tissue, connective tissue, or bone — after a bump developed on her left foot last spring.

Marlee is an incredible young girl. According to ABC News, she used her Make-A-Wish Foundation wish to build stuffed animals for other cancer patients.

This year, Marlee has had to miss a lot of school. In February, her foot had to be amputated, after which her doctors began chemotherapy treatments that caused her to lose her hair.

In preparation for Marlee's return back to school following her final chemotherapy treatment, her teacher and classmates considered different ways in which they could make her feel comfortable. Together, they came up with "Be Bold, Be Brave, Go Bald," an assembly wherein teachers, students, and parents all shaved their heads.

Marlee was in attendance and was full of gratitude for all the love she was shown. "I didn't think that many people would shave their heads, but I feel good about going back to school and not being the only bald one," Marlee told Today.com.

According to ABC News, the first person to have her head shaved was Marlee's best friend, Cameron McLaughlin. Marlee reportedly sat with her and held her hand the entire time, ensuring her it was okay to cry if she wanted.

In total, 80 students, three female teachers, both male principals, and a student's mother volunteered to have their heads shaved.

The event also brought in over \$25,000 in donations, which will go to St. Baldrick's Foundation, a charity that funds cancer research for children, Today.com reported.

— Raven Clabough



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