

US Restaurants raises \$3 million for Project CARE

When five-year-old Charlie Malandro of Colleegeville asked his mother to take him to the Burger King in Whitpain last month, he had no idea what awaited him. In addition to the burgers and French fries he expected, Charlie, his mother and sister were greeted with a serving of balloons, flowers, toys and cake.

It turns out the surprised family had been identified as the customers who purchased a Burger King fund-raising coupon sheet that represented the three millionth dollar raised by US Restaurants, the area Burger King franchisee for Bucks and Montgomery counties for the benefit of Project CARE.

Project CARE is an education and training program for adults working with young people in schools and communities. US Restaurants is now in its 21st year of fund-raising for Project CARE, which is based in Quakertown.

Project CARE was founded in 1985 after a rash of drug-related teen suicides in Upper Bucks. The parent company and sponsoring organization for Project CARE is a local non-profit organization called justCommunity Inc.

"What an amazing milestone! The commitment of US Restaurants has been phenomenal over the past 21 years," said just Community Executive Director Lee Rush.

As soon as Charlie's mother, Jackie, contributed one dollar and received the Burger King coupon sheet supporting Project CARE in its efforts to promote healthy youth development and prevent substance abuse, the Malandros were presented with a congratulatory card and gift certificate in addition to the other gifts.

Jackie joked that Charlie and



Jackie Malandro (front) and her two children, Charlie, 5, and Cassie, 2, are joined by representatives of US Restaurants, Project CARE and justCommunity after purchasing a coupon sheet at the Whitpain Burger King May 11. The coupons represented \$3 million raised by US Restaurants for Project CARE, an education and training program that promotes wellness, resiliency and success in youth. From left to right are Alesia Gully, General Manager, Whitpain Burger King; Lee Rush, Executive Director, justCommunity; Greg Winans, Vice President of Operations, US Restaurants; Lana Rosiek, Marketing Manager, US Restaurants; and Marlene Ruby, Director, Project CARE.

his sister, 2-year-old Cassie, will be expecting the royal treatment now every time they visit Burger King. All kidding aside, however, she said of US Restaurants' efforts to support young people, "This is something that is close to my heart."

Jackie is a special education teacher and has participated in the coupon sale campaign for years, as she is a regular Burger King customer with her family.

US Restaurants became involved with Project CARE after learning that youth were selling drugs outside the Quakertown Burger King in the mid-1980s.

Steven Lewis, President of US Restaurants, recently recalled how he first learned of the seriousness of the substance abuse problem in and

around some of his stores.

"It was a Friday night and I was at the restaurant watching some of the things that were going on," he said. "There was drug dealing in the vicinity of our restaurant, and there was actually a drug bust on our lot. Cocaine was being sold to 15-year-olds."

Seeing this, on the heels of adolescent suicides in the Quakertown area, was a wake-up call, he said.

"I knew this was something we really needed to get behind to help the community," he said, adding that within his own family he's seen what drugs can do. "It's terrible what it can do to a family. It can tear the fabric of the family apart."

US Restaurants has always been committed to community and to youth, Lewis said.

"We have a lot of youth working in our restaurants," he said. "We see the pressures, tugs and pulls they are up against. This is the driving force behind what we try to do in our communities."

As far as Lewis is concerned, it's the little successes that make it all worthwhile. "If we can save just one child, it's worth every dollar that we raise," he said.

In addition to the yearly coupon sale that runs from March to May, US Restaurants, in cooperation with the local senior services nonprofit company LifeQuest, holds the annual Project CARE Golf benefit. This year, the golf outing was held June 12 at the Plymouth Country Club in Plymouth Meeting and raised more than \$30,000.

"It's remarkable to have this kind of continuing support and

commitment to a cause that helps young people make healthy choices in their lives," said Marlene Ruby, director of Project CARE.

Ruby said US Restaurants' commitment to Project CARE extends from the corporate heads throughout the entire organization, which was evident at the golf benefit.

"It was refreshing to see that after 21 years everyone was still enthusiastic about what they were doing," she said.

Thanks to US Restaurants, Project CARE is also able to award higher education scholarships to students formerly in crisis because of alcohol and other drug or mental health issues. These young people must have been referred to their high school's Student Assistant Program (SAP) and are now headed toward successful college careers. Since the student scholarship program began in 1996, a total of \$230,000 has been awarded to 57 young people.

Project CARE, which has trained more than 20,000 individuals involved in topics such as Cyber Bullying, Adolescent Female Relational Aggression, Self Mutilation/Self Injury and Eating Disorders, and is also a state approved provider of Student Assistance Program (SAP) training.

SAP training prepare school and community agency staff to serve on student assistance teams that identify students at risk and intervene, enabling them to get on the right track and complete successful school careers.

You can learn more about Project CARE by visiting www.projectcare.org or by calling 215-538-4787.

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