

Written by Julie Warren 5/22/2020

For several weeks we (Erie Design) were in a nail-biting situation as we, like so many, didn't know what would happen to our small family business. A local parent that I've known for years, as we have raised our children together, approached us and asked if we could make yard signs for seniors. We said "of course!" so the first positive thing happened in that she posted a picture of the sign we made for her son on the LHS Senior parent page and the orders starting pouring in!

Simultaneously a group of amazing Lakewood women reached out to me...I'm calling them "The Benefactors" who basically said "Here's my money. I want to buy signs for seniors whose families can't afford them. Put me down for 3 (or 4 or 5)." Not only were they guaranteeing some struggling students the opportunity to be recognized, they were also supporting a small Lakewood business. I went to a friend who works for the Board of Education and she, in turn, reached out to counselors who identified students who would be good candidates as sign recipients.

Fast forward to several days later as the donated signs were completed, we now had a PILE of signs that needed to be put into the students' (who had no idea that they were coming) yards. With the level of "busy" that we had reached at the shop, I was growing anxious at the idea of delivering two dozen signs all over town by myself. And then....I engaged in an on-line conversation with Pastor Jonathan at Lakewood Baptist church who merely reached out to see what WAS being done for HS seniors in the community as far as signage. When I explained about The Benefactors and the pile of signs, he said "Don't give it another thought. We are going to take this off your plate. Let me get with some volunteers and I will be back in touch."

After several messages back and forth, we arranged pick up of the signs and he secured several small groups of volunteers, all families who had been quarantined together. These are his words to me after the signs were delivered by their team: "It was a BLESSING to all of them. We sent out five teams. It was a 'right-sized ministry': Folks got to leave their homes...and they did so as household/family units...and they were able to be out in the world for a really loving reason (not just running for provisions). They clearly were happy to play some small role in the blessing, while at the same time, being sneaky and secretive about it all. One person said "it was like a treasure hunt" googling all those addresses...but WE weren't hunting treasure...we were delivering!" Their group even took time out of their Sunday Zoom to reflect on the experience. Jonathan said "it's amazing how 'little things' can prove such big blessings."

Furthering the win/win/win situation: Seniors recognized, a small business supported, volunteers given an opportunity to feel relevant...a woman from Horace Mann called me as she wanted to get signs for all of their special needs 5<sup>th</sup> graders but was unable to afford them (I'm sure she was paying for them out of her pocket!) and when I told her that many signs had already been paid for in advance and I would be happy to include these students in the donated ones, she was BLOWN AWAY! I thought she would cry on the phone. An incredible domino effect starting by a Lakewood mom's idea and the support of an amazing group of women who just wanted to give our small business a boost made for a magical experience for us. I cried over and over during this experience from gratitude and just being so very moved by it all.

