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# 'Almost indescribable': JCC president travels to Israel for mission trip

By **Pete DeLuca, WPXI-TV**

November 20, 2023 at 11:26 pm EST

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November 20, 2023 at 11:26 pm EST

PITTSBURGH — As the conflict between Israel and Hamas rages on, a local Jewish leader is getting a first-hand look at the impact.

Jason Kunzman, the president and CEO of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke to Channel 11 from the Tel Aviv airport in Israel, preparing to return home after spending the last six days on a mission trip there.

"My heart is broken," he said. "I have seen, I promise you, what is absolutely unimaginable. I have heard stories that will in all likelihood haunt me for the rest of my life. And at the same time, I am truly inspired by the grit, the determination, the commitment of this nation."

Kunzman and leaders from a handful of other Jewish Community Centers across the US made the trip, getting a firsthand look at the destruction caused by the ongoing conflict.

They visited two of the areas most deeply impacted.

"It's almost indescribable. Houses are burnt. Belongings strewn all over," Kunzman explained.

From the time Kunzman first got off the plane, entering a nearly empty airport, he felt the gravity of the situation.

"It was really eerie," he described. "And then, right out of the gate, as I was making my way towards customs, the corridor was lined on both sides with posters of folks who had been taken hostage."

But Kunzman and his fellow JCC executives wanted to bring positivity and support, doing volunteer work and helping to pack hundreds of care packages for Israeli soldiers. Each one included a hand drawn card from JCC students in Pittsburgh.

"Myself and the 12 other execs that I was here in Israel with, we all brought sort of tokens of appreciation, of kindness, of love, so each of those packages was stuffed with some type of token, if you will, from each of our respective communities."

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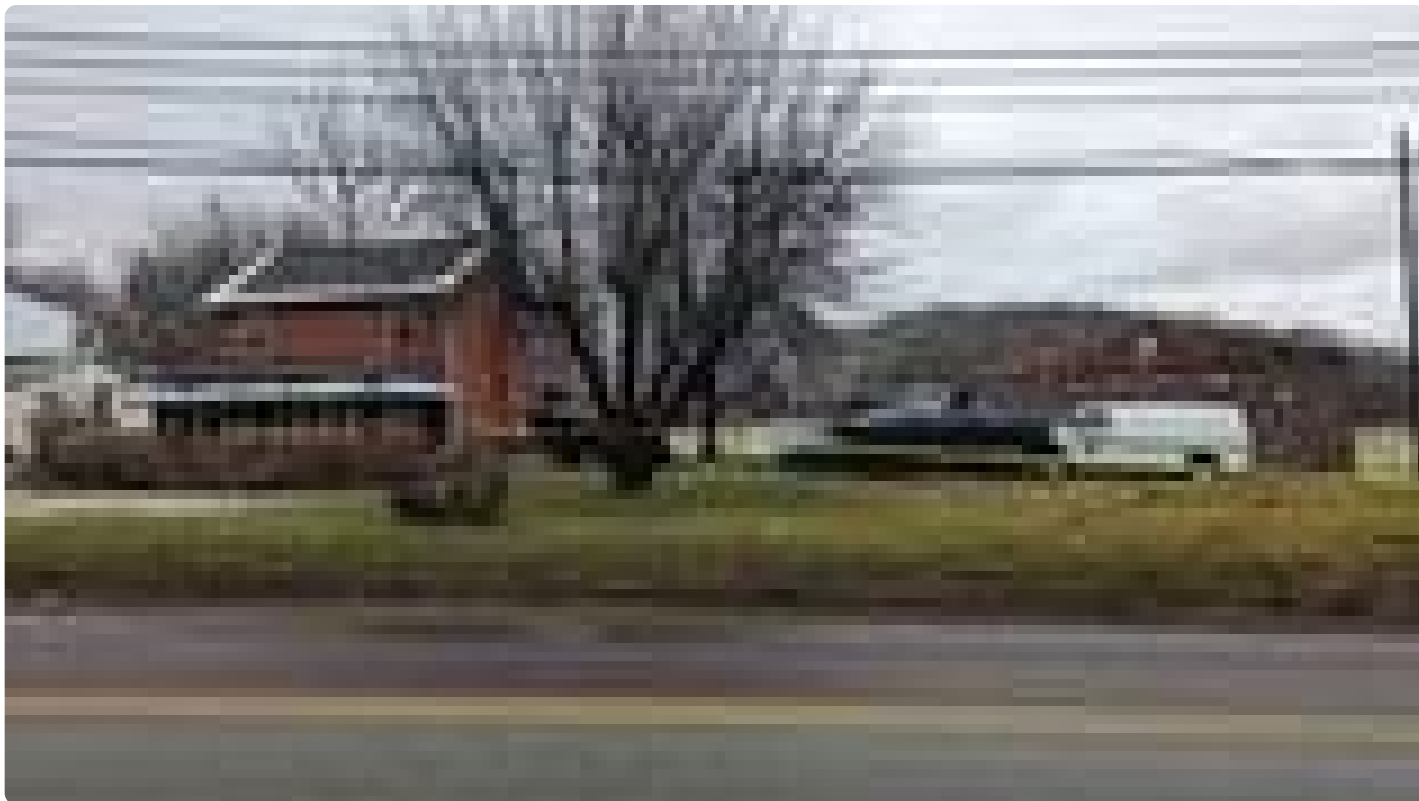


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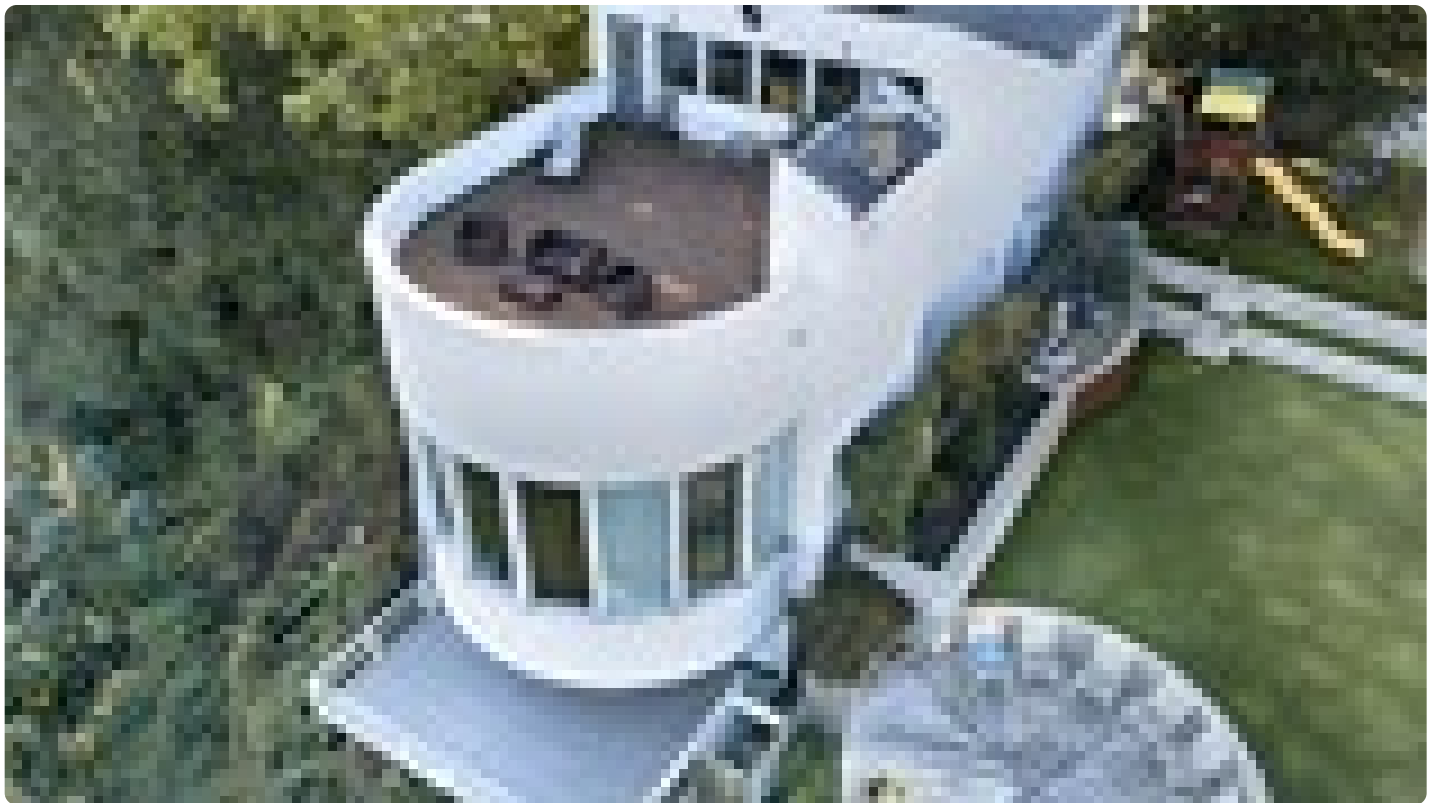
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# Avonworth School District among local organizations participating in World Kindness Day

By **Jennifer Tomazic, WPXI-TV**

November 13, 2023 at 11:25 am EST

By **Jennifer Tomazic, WPXI-TV**

November 13, 2023 at 11:25 am EST

Buy a coffee for someone or reach out to that friend you haven't talked to in a while.

These are just a few easy ways to mark World Kindness Day today.

Several kindness projects have gotten their start here in Pittsburgh.

Like the #bethekindkid campaign.

It started in the Avonworth School District, but it has spread around the region with students and teachers wearing their #bethekindkid T-shirts in many districts. There are even some kindness clubs in other states now, too.



This year, 50 different Kindness in Action Projects are happening in Southwestern Pennsylvania World Kindness Day.

The kids at Avalon Elementary in the Northgate School District collected cereal to donate to North Hills Community Outreach food pantry. They set up all the boxes and knocked them down like dominoes to show that kindness has a domino effect.

Some students in Bethel Park made a kindness friendship bookmark, where they put a friendship tassel on a bookmark and wrote a kindness poem on it. They're on display at the Children's Museum and the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh's South Hills location.

Other students in Bethel Park School District made cards to give to assisted living residents.

Pittsburgh Linden PreK-5 is hosting a food drive on Monday.

Another kindness campaign that started in Pittsburgh is the #loveliketheboys campaign.

It is in honor of David and Cecil Rosenthal, who were killed at the Tree of Life synagogue.

Their movement encourages people to do simple acts of kindness and to love like David and Cecil did.

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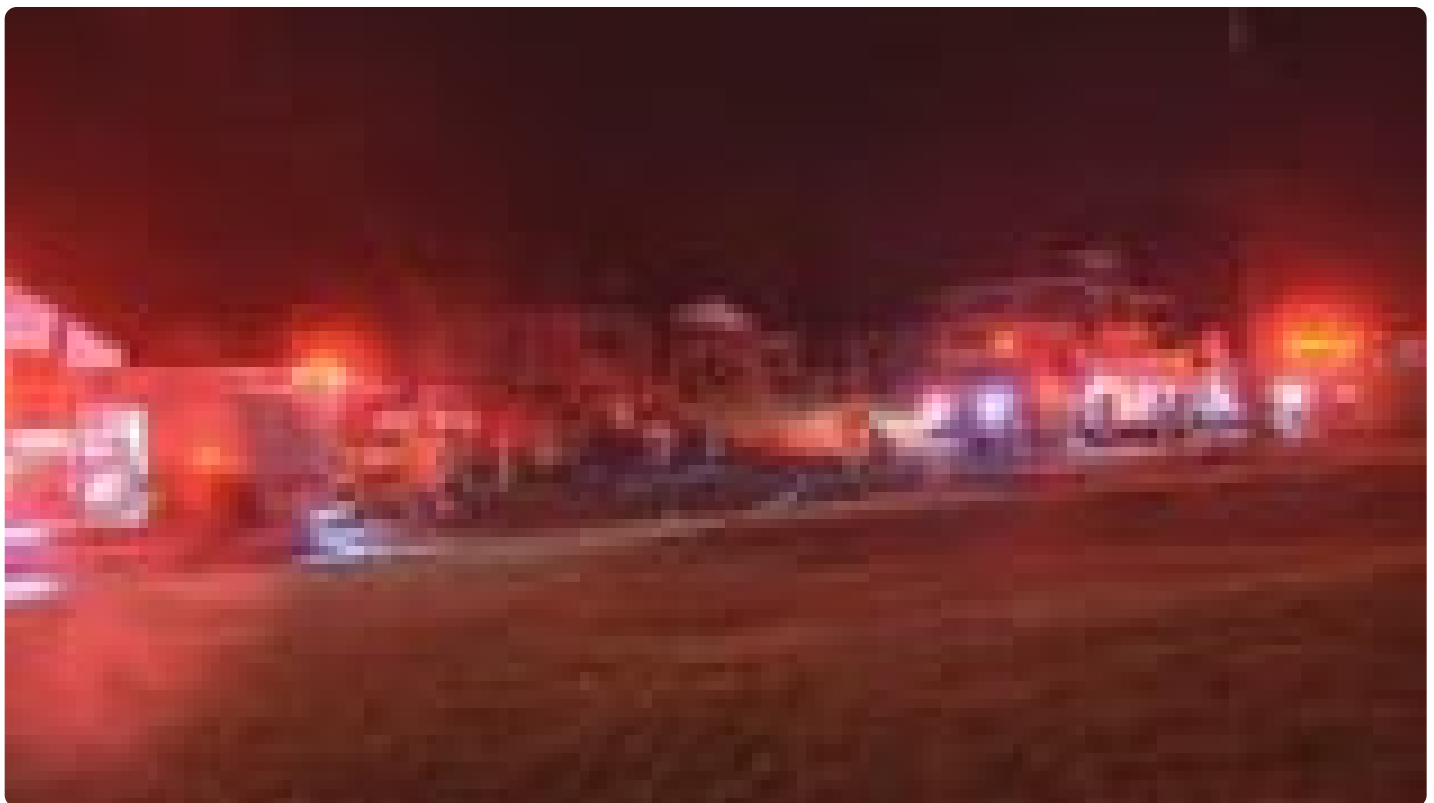
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# Hundreds of Pittsburghers plan to travel to D.C. Tuesday to join March for Israel

Pete DeLuca  
November 13, 2023 at 11:37 PM · 2 min read



Hundreds of people from Pittsburgh are preparing to head to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday to show their support for Israel amid the ongoing conflict with Hamas.

The March for Israel is planned from 1 to 3 p.m. at the National Mall.

“This will be one of the largest rallies on behalf of Israel that the Jewish community has organized,” said Brian Schreiber, the Chief External Affairs Officer for the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh.

Event organizers expect close to 100,000 people.

Schreiber will be among them. He lived in Israel in the 1980s and has been back several times since.

“When you have relationships, when you have friends and family and you see people in pain, you want to be there to support them and this is the opportunity to show that we care,” Schreiber said.

The march is being hosted by Jewish Federations across the country.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh is sending more than 300 people on 10 buses.

“It’s so important right now to stand with Israel, and for the Jewish Federation, it’s just a great opportunity to bring people together at a time in which they’re hurting or in pain and introduce something positive and show our support,” said Adam Hertzman, the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh’s Associate Vice President of Marketing.

Tuesday’s rally in D.C. comes as the death toll in Gaza tops 11,000 — and 1,200 in Israel.

Monday night, on Carnegie Mellon University’s campus, students and faculty gathered for a candlelight Vigil for Gaza to mourn the lives lost.

>> [Vigil held at CMU to mourn lives lost during war in Middle East](#)

“I think the issue is that this conflict is being seen as a religious conflict when it shouldn’t be seen as a religious conflict. All religions should be respected and need to be respected, and that includes our Jewish brothers and sisters,” said Farida Abdelmoneum, a CMU student and Vigil for Gaza organizer.

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ISRAEL AT WAR / FOUR UPCOMING DRIVES SCHEDULED

# JCC and Federation partner with organizations to support blood collection and supply in Israel

Blood drives will be held at the JCCs in Squirrel Hill and the South Hills

By **TOBY TABACHNICK**

November 3, 2023, 1:03 pm



(Image via Pexels)

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh and the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh are partnering with Vitalant and American Friends of Magen David Adom to host blood drives to ensure the local blood supply remains high in case blood needs to be transported to Israel.

These efforts are part of a tenure Contingency Agreement in place since 2018 between U.S. blood centers and Magen David Adom.

“In Judaism it is a mitzvah to save a life,” said Laura Cherner, director of the Federation’s Community Relations Council. “Not only do these blood drives save lives but they also demonstrate solidarity with the people of Israel at this difficult time. I believe that this partnership will inspire a significant number of individuals who have never donated blood before.”

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blood drives in partnership with Vitalant over the past five years

Four blood drives are scheduled for the following dates and locations:

JCC Squirrel Hill, Katz Theater, 5738 Darlington Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

- Tuesday, Nov, 7, 12 noon – 6 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 30, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

- Tuesday, Dec. 5, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

JCC South Hills, gymnasium, 345 Kane Blvd, Pittsburgh, PA 15243

- Monday, Nov. 20, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Appointments are strongly encouraged. To schedule an appointment:

- Visit [vitalant.org](https://vitalant.org), click on the “Make an Appointment” button and search w/group code UC189 for Squirrel Hill and UC438 for JCC South Hills
- or download the Vitalant-Pittsburgh mobile app on your smartphone
- or call 877.25. VITAL (877-258-4825). **PJC**

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# 'Such a critical part of Jewish peoplehood': CEO of JCC Pittsburgh on solidarity mission in Israel

Updated: 10:23 PM EST Nov 17, 2023



Mike Valente

Reporter

**PITTSBURGH** — When Jason Kunzman returns home to Pittsburgh next Tuesday, his experiences in Israel will be at the forefront of his mind.

"We're seeing the devastation as well as a ton of inspiration," Kunzman said. "I'll take that back with me."



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Kunzman, the president and CEO of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh, is in Israel with 12 other JCC executives as they offer their unwavering support for the state and its people.

"Israel is such a critical part of Jewish peoplehood," Kunzman said. "This is the Jewish homeland."

Kunzman is staying in a Jerusalem hotel that is also housing Israelis who have been displaced from their homes in Sderot, following the Oct. 7 invasion and slaughter committed by Hamas terrorists.

"It has been a very, very heartwarming experience to be able to be among these Israeli citizens, to speak with them, to learn about their experiences, and really just to say 'Hey, we're here with you,'" Kunzman said.

Kunzman said he felt compelled to show up not only because of his faith, but also because he's a Pittsburgher.

"The Israeli community – they were right with us back in 2018 in the aftermath of the synagogue attack," Kunzman said of the Oct. 27, 2018, attack on three congregations in the Tree of Life Synagogue. "And it was deeply, deeply felt."

Speaking of the Israelis he has met, Kunzman said they remain laser-focused on the mission to eliminate Hamas, but that they're also dreaming of a post-war future.

"I really think that that's part of the Israeli character," Kunzman said. "The grit and

determination of this small but mighty nation."



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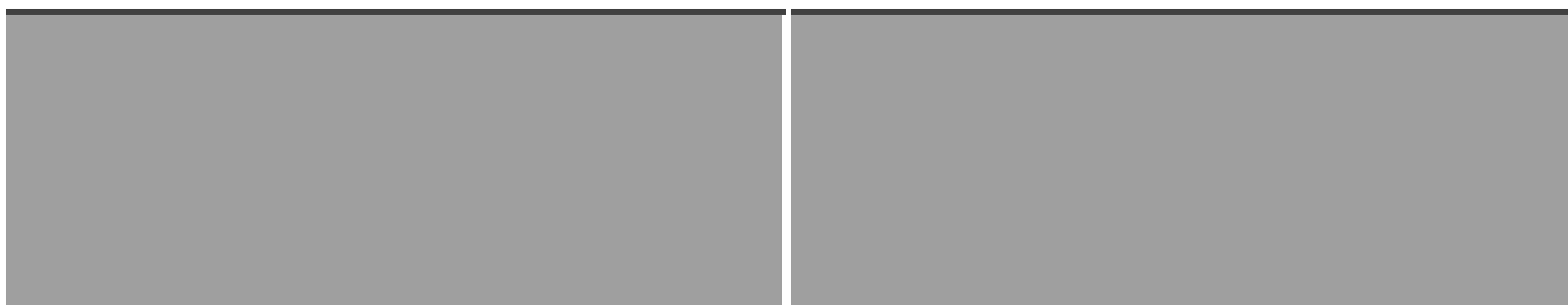


**Hundreds from Pittsburgh head to Washington to March for Israel**



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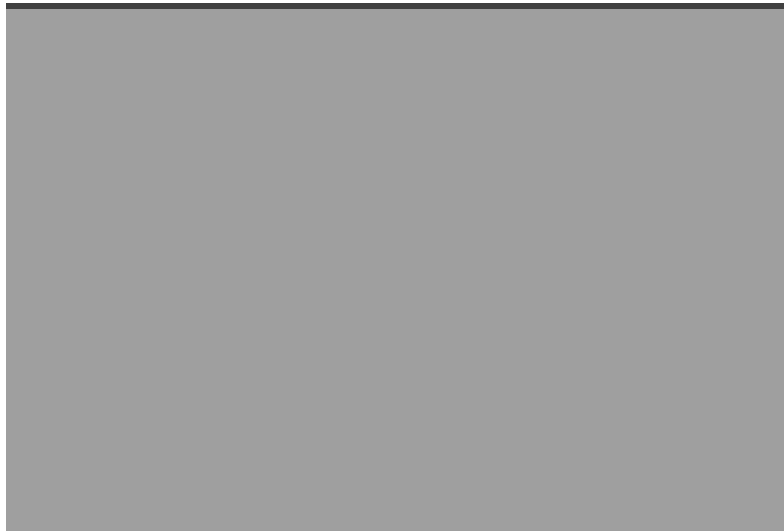




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# Kindness in Action celebrations are happening at the Children's Museum, JCC South Hills and in local communities

November 13, 2023 • Melissa Rayworth

Today is World Kindness Day. You might notice Pittsburghers donning cardigans to [celebrate](#) the [beloved Fred Rogers](#). But for many local kids the celebrating began weeks ago. More than 4,300

students from 140 classrooms in 11 school districts have been participating in the [#bethekindkid Kindness in Action](#) campaign since it began in September.

In Upper St. Clair, high schoolers planned a Kindness Week celebration that took place during mid-October. Members of USCHS Student Council and the school's [No Place for Hate](#) committee even donned capes and masks to show elementary schoolers that kindness is a superpower.

On visits to Baker, Eisenhower and Streams elementary schools, they helped students make their own kindness superhero masks, and helped first and second graders write thank you notes to someone special. [Check out the video here.](#)

“We hope our efforts to promote kindness will actually reach every high school student,” said USC senior Carly Shontz. “Kindness is so important in treating others with respect and creating a good environment for us to learn and socialize in.”





Upper St. Clair High School students spent Oct. 16-20.

Along with Shontz, students included seniors Ava Casciato, Kate Falce, Joe Donnelly and Luke McDonough; juniors Ryan Larocco, Ben Seewald, Emma Toosi and Jack Yurcich; sophomores Bella Donnelly, Gianna D’Orazio, Braidyn Recker, Lily Simons and Gigi Spina; and freshmen Caty Howard, Coco Jones, Trevor McClintock–Comeaux and Rachel Scharrer.

Student leadership team members said they hope their classmates had a better day because of their efforts to promote kindness.

“Even if it is just one person, it is worth it because that one person having a better day could lead to so many more positive actions in the future,” said junior Ryan Larocco. “While not everyone will be kind all

the time, hopefully these efforts can be the beginnings of a kinder Upper St. Clair High School.”

Dr. Dan Beck, assistant principal, and Brooke Tarcson, head of student activities, enjoyed serving as advisers for the project.

“It was awesome to partner with students as we reflected on the impact of kindness in our lives, and all we needed to do was provide them with the opportunity,” Dr. Beck said. “Students were truly empowered to discover innovative ways to spread kindness in our community, and it was a blast to watch how it all played out.”

## **MAKER PROJECTS YOU CAN TRY AT HOME**

Other students in more than a dozen local classrooms have created craft projects that promote kindness. We'll be sharing instructions for those projects throughout the coming weeks as part of our [Maker Monday](#) series.

Kids can [try this week's project](#), created by kindergarteners at Bethel Park's Memorial Elementary School. The Bethel Park students planned a donation drive to help South Hills Pet Rescue and they created colorful posters to promote their effort. Your child can dream up their own kindness effort and follow the project instructions to make their own poster.

Coming up next week: a “kindness keychain” maker project created by students at Fox Chapel's Hartwood Elementary School.





#bethekindkid Kindness in Action

## PUBLIC DISPLAYS FOR FAMILIES TO ENJOY

Meanwhile, art projects and digital artifacts created by students from dozens of other schools are on display beginning today at the #bethekindkid Kindness in Action Campaign exhibit spaces at the [Children's Museum](#) cafe and at the [Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh](#) (JCC) South Hills location.

At the Children's Museum, families will see items created by students from Bethel Park, Pine-Richland, Mt. Lebanon and Fox Chapel, along with the campaign's inspiring [celebration video](#). At the JCC, families can visit the Kindness Tree created by students at Elizabeth Forward School District.

All this creative work is meant to inspire kindness in those who experience it. But just as powerfully, the work of creating kindness-infused art and doing the kind of outreach that the teenagers did in Upper St. Clair can be really valuable for those making the effort.

“As high school students and young adults, I think it can be difficult to enjoy moments in the present,” said USCHS’s Larocco.

“Too often, we are looking at our future or worrying about our past. The little kids reintroduced the simplicity and pure joy of life to me. Mrs. Kopeko, a kindergarten teacher at Streams, was telling us that she hopes that what she teaches in kindergarten sticks with her students and they can keep the joy as they grow older. I am so glad I was able to feel that joy and carry that with me for as long as I can.”

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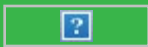


## 'I Almost Can't Believe It': Defying expectations and proving what's possible in the Duquesne City School District



### Melissa Rayworth □

Melissa Rayworth is the executive editor of Kidsburgh. She has spent two decades writing about families, parenting, culture and design for global and regional magazines and news outlets. She lives with her husband and two sons in Hampton.



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