

POWER from page 1A

Described as “a citywide day dedicated to volunteering and giving back,” the event encouraged community members to plan beautification, cleaning and fundraising projects around the area. More than 500 people participated in the event, which led to it becoming an annual fixture of Florence’s calendar, held the third Saturday of July.

After several years, Kaylee created the Power Pack to get more kids involved with subsequent events. One of those members was Ava Glowacki, who, along with her family, took over the planning of Power of Florence officially after the 2017 event, when Ava was a seventh-grader.

This year is the 10th annual Power of Florence, but a physical event is not feasible under the COVID-19 pandemic and mandated social distancing measures.

On the Power of Florence Facebook page, Ava, now a 15-year-old sophomore, and her mom Ella posted, “Due to Covid-19, this year’s Power of Florence will look very different than it has in the past. But don’t worry, there are still so many ways to make a difference! Because we want to keep Florence healthy, we will not have any official events. However, we are hoping you will help us celebrate the spirit of the Power of Florence by practicing acts of kindness

on Saturday, July 18, while socially distancing.”

On July 13, Kaylee and her mom Shannon posted one way people can help out this Saturday.

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Old School Furniture, 1550 Sixth St., Power of Florence volunteers will be collecting gently used children’s books and selling organic, freshly picked blueberries to raise money to get books into the hands of Siuslaw Elementary School students who have little or no children’s books in their homes.

Despite the lack of togetherness, volunteering families like the Grahams and Glowackis have sought out ways to be involved in the community.

“I wish we could do a physical event for this year, but, COVID,” said Ava. “I think we’re going to do a family beach cleanup on that day to hopefully volunteer while distancing.”

Kaylee and her family eventually decided on the book drive.

“Now, more than ever with the uncertainty of school due to COVID-19, we want to ensure that all kids have access to books, especially at home,” Shannon said. “The money raised will be used to purchase new books through First Book, a nonprofit organization that sells new books at huge discounts for Title I Schools.”

As for reaching 10 years, both Kaylee as the founder

and Ava as the successor of Power of Florence said it has been an exciting journey.

“I think it’s amazing that the Power of Florence has gone on this long,” Kaylee said. “It’s cool to see how the community has encompassed the day. From the first day, they embraced it really well, but as the years went on, people brought it into their own hands and began doing it on their own. Watching that evolution

community and how much the community helps out. It’s really the community’s day. We’re just the facilitators, just the behind the scenes organizing stuff,” she said.

Each Power of Florence relies on people planning their own event. This can be anything from local Boy Scouts cleaning up parks, large-scale Scotch broom removal sponsored by Save the Oregon Dunes and

time, we are going out ourselves, socially distanced, to clean up a neighbor’s yard and things like that. Hopefully I’ll be able to invite a few of friends,” Ava said.

Before COVID-19, Kaylee’s time was split between community college and Oregon State University, where she is studying communications with a minor in earth sciences.

“I wish I could say I had been able to keep up volun-

following the original intent of Power of Florence. Basically, we want to introduce volunteerism to as many people as possible, particularly youth and kids. This town is small, and it is limited in what you can do. ... What can you do to make a difference in the community? Ava really wants to run with that. If there’s a way to further Power of Florence, it would be through bringing in more kids, more youth volunteers. Maybe getting a bunch of high schoolers involved who could make it their own, make it something super meaningful.”

The next step would be to initiate a club, since “We’ve kind of reached that point where I don’t think I could pass this on to a kid anymore,” Ava said.

She said she liked the idea of a student-led group that include more voices.

“It could be a whole community, a whole high school, taking it on. I think that would be beautiful,” she added.

A committee, too, would allow more kids the chance to organize an event beyond the boundaries of the school district.

“More kids would learn the skills that I think Ava and Kaylee have come away so beautifully with — how to work with a city on planning a big event and how to speak in public,” Ella said. “I don’t think that Ava even realizes the impact this has had on her life because she hasn’t had that distance yet, but I’m sure Kaylee is already feeling it. She has that ease of being able to speak to everyone.”

In 2011, Kaylee had to get comfortable fast with speaking in public. She was interviewed by KCST Coast Radio host Bob Sneddon several times, the Siuslaw News and even Radio Disney. Those interviews continued through her selection as the 2017 Florence Future First Citizen at the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce’s Siuslaw Awards.

“Working with the Power of Florence and all the other experiences I’ve had through volunteering have really put me where I am in life,” Kaylee said. “As a communications major who wants to public speak, communicate with people and do things, I think those have helped develop main aspects of my personality.”

Thinking about past Power of Florence events got the young women thinking. Both gave an example of what encapsulates this annual day of service.

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— Ella Glowacki, mother of Power of Florence organizer Ava

from year one now to year 10 has been super amazing.”

The three organizers — Kaylee, Ava and her mom Ella — were able to meet in a Zoom video call about the history of Power of Florence, current plans and hopes for the future.

They first talked about Kaylee’s inclusion of younger kids.

“In the Power Pack, Kaylee always shared her super high energy and her positivity for Florence and local volunteerism,” Ella said. “Ava was just able to jump right in. It was such a cool fit.”

Kaylee later picked Ava to partner with her, with the two planning several years of Power of Florence together. At just 17, Kaylee officially handed off Power of Florence in 2017. Ava was in seventh-grade, so relied heavily on her family and her own version of a Power Pack.

Lately, however, “Ava has taken the lead on herself,” said Ella.

Both Ella and Ava said that Kaylee has been a continued source of inspiration for Power of Florence. With Kaylee home from college during the COVID-19 closure of schools and colleges, they have been able to consult her on multiple aspects of the program.

“Kaylee may have passed the torch on, but she’s still super involved with every decision we make,” Ella said. “She set such a high bar that we’re always wondering, ‘What would Kaylee do?’ Our desire to keep it at the level of what she created is next to impossible.”

Ava agreed. “She did such a great job!”

But Kaylee refused to take full credit.

“I think it goes back to the

the Florence Garden Club sprucing up Gallagher’s Park to the many people who gathered for the annual Party in the Parking Lot at Grocery Outlet. This event often included multiple groups sharing information, selling lemonade and cookies, roasting burgers and hot dogs, painting faces and entertaining volunteers after the completion of projects.

The day traditionally began with a pancake breakfast at Florence United Methodist Church and ended at the Florence Events Center for the Florence Van Fans annual pie and ice cream social.

Ella said that people have been in touch with her this year, too, about ways they can donate to a cause or buy the Power of Florence T-Shirt.

“Just yesterday I met somebody who bought shirts and then donated a beautiful homemade cutting board he wants to be used if we ever hold an auction to raise money. It’s so sweet that someone in our community is going to go out of his way to meet me in the Grocery Outlet parking lot at 10 in the morning to buy a sweatshirt. It’s just so sweet. That’s Florence. It’s truly amazing,” she said.

Even without a planned Power of Florence this year, volunteering continues in every season.

During the regular part of the school year, Ava was able to be active in the Siuslaw Education Expo, the Knitting Club and other service clubs at school. In 2019 she was a counselor at Outdoor School. Plus, she has carried on with her Little Libraries, which she first began in 2014 at nine years old.

“Now, when we have

teering, but it’s been super challenging with school,” Kaylee said.

She has been back in Florence since this spring, and has since been working and reengaging with the community.

For anyone needing advice on volunteering, Ava had this to say: “Bring your neighbors up and help them out. I guarantee they’re struggling, too. At the beginning of quarantine, we basically broke our mixer and made 100 cookies. We went and ‘ding-dong-ditched’ our neighbors and friends around town and left them cookies. That seemed to cheer a bunch of people up. You can do something as small as that. It would really help your neighbors and make you feel good as well.”

Kaylee followed with, “It goes back to our Power of Florence saying: ‘Each one. One day. Making a difference together.’ It’s about each person doing their own thing to collectively help the community. That’s now true even more than it has been in the past.”

Since the Power of Florence is community-driven — the logo contains both the phrase “Power of Florence” and “Power of ONE” — the event looks a little different each time.

“It’s very year-by-year with our planning,” Ava. “We get so many new people who are interested every year. I feel like if we were to plan ahead super far, we would miss out on a bunch of people and their ideas. We don’t have a big masterplan. I kind of wish we did sometimes, but if we live year-by-year, we get so many more opportunities for people to come in and help us out.”

For Ella, “That is really

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