

After featuring in “One Good Thing,” volunteers keep on giving

By The Associated Press

For more than a year, The Associated Press has been bringing you “One Good Thing” — stories highlighting good deeds done by individuals to brighten others’ days during trying times.

Usually, their stories don’t end there. They keep volunteering their time, energy, and resources to help people in need, even if their own lives were also turned upside down by a pandemic that has killed and sickened millions around the world. Sometimes they’ve received recognition for their service, or seen support and donations roll in as a result of the publicity.

Below is a check in with several of those heroes with updates to their stories.

Books for cereal mix

In February of this year, The AP brought you the story of Bonifaz Díaz. He biked in and around the Guatemalan highlands city of Quetzaltenango with his saddlebags filled with donated books to barter for an oatmeal-like cereal mix, Incaparina, that a non-governmental organization was using to feed nearly 400 children in need.

Díaz is still covering around 90 miles per week in the city at a lung-busting 7,640 feet above sea level. Mostly, he makes his trips in the morning because it’s the rainy season and storms typically roll in during the afternoon. He figures he collects about 80 pounds of Incaparina a week, enough to keep the malnutrition program going.

Díaz had worried that the barter donations could dry up as pandemic lockdowns eased in the country, but the opposite turned out to be the case: Donor interest has surged, three other cyclists have joined him since February, and a local cycle shop is now doing maintenance on their bikes for free.

“My fear was that once they started being less afraid (of the coronavirus),



ALTRUISTIC AVIATOR. TJ Kim, a student at The Landon School, is seen during an event to honor volunteers helping to battle the coronavirus in the Blue Room of the White House in Washington, D.C., in this May 1, 2020 file photo. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File)

people wouldn’t feel as committed,” Díaz said. “But the project has been getting stronger because people participate.”

Even as he hopes to return to work in the coming weeks at the theater company he co-founded — shut down for more than a year due to the pandemic — he intends to keep the barter project up and running.

“I feel that there’s reason for it to exist even without the pandemic,” Díaz said. “The problem of child malnutrition is always latent.”

NYC food distribution program

Despite her own coronavirus-related struggles, including a lost job and overdue rent on her martial arts studio, Sofia Moncayo spearheaded a New York City food distribution program as it ballooned to serve hundreds of people suddenly struggling to stave off hunger.

After The AP’s story was published more than three months ago, more people came forward wanting to support the project, organized through the Mosaic West Queens church and community center,

California says \$5 million Ponzi scam bilked older Filipinos

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California’s attorney general has charged 15 people with conspiring to defraud mostly elderly victims of Filipino descent out of a combined \$5 million.

They’re accused of bilking at least 30 victims mostly in the Sacramento and Stockton areas through what Attorney General Rob Bonta alleged was an international Ponzi scheme framed around the construction of the Pagudpud Sands Resort.

Bonta said the resort in the Philippines hasn’t

opened or produced any income. His office could not immediately say if any of those charged have defense attorneys.

Prosecutors allege that the defendants have lied to potential investors at group sales presentations since late 2015 to encourage their investments.

One 83-year-old invested \$230,000, the charges say, while others invested tens of thousands of dollars. An 84-year-old woman put in \$500,000.

The perpetrators falsely said a major, well-known hotel company had agreed to manage the resort, prosecutors said. Victims were paid “interest” on their investments that

actually came from other victims’ investments and not the resort itself.

Instead of funding the resort, prosecutors say most of the money went to paying two of the defendants at least \$10,000 a month. Thousands of dollars also went to commissions for those who brought in additional investors or for other unrelated marketing schemes, the charges say.

The 98 separate charges filed in Sacramento County Superior Court include grand theft, financial elder abuse, selling unqualified securities, securities fraud, and communications containing untrue statements and omissions of material facts.

Moncayo said recently by e-mail.

Touring musicians David Shenton and Erin Shields, the subjects of another story, assembled a cast of Broadway stars and celebrities for a benefit concert that raised about \$6,000 for the pantry in a single evening, Moncayo said. The Kelly Clarkson Show donated \$5,000 for the pantry and also paid for Moncayo, Shields, and another volunteer to go on an upcoming vacation to the Bahamas in appreciation for their efforts. And LaGuardia Community College invited Moncayo to speak at its 2021 commencement ceremonies.

Moncayo said that with a federal farm-to-families food program that ended at the end of May, the pantry is looking to boost its \$20,000 monthly budget to \$30,000 to keep up with demand.

“The work at the food pantry continues,” she wrote, “and our fundraising efforts are more important than ever.”

Operation Supplies Over the Skies

TJ Kim, a high school student and aviator living in McLean, Virginia, was recognized as one of 10 noted youth volunteers in the country. His accomplishment: afterschool missions

flying more than 90,000 items of gloves, masks, gowns, and other personal protective equipment to 20 rural hospitals in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia.

The distinction — awarded during a virtual celebration in May 2020 — came with a \$7,500 scholarship and a \$5,000 grant to a nonprofit of Kim’s choice. With India in crisis as the world’s pandemic epicenter, he plans to give the grant to an organization doing COVID-19 relief work in the South Asian nation.

Kim devised Operation Supplies Over the Skies, or Operation SOS, as a way to help the community and keep himself active after his lacrosse season was shut down. The response he got from hospital staffers was rewarding, and he plans to continue making deliveries even after the pandemic eases or ends altogether.

“I’ve always said from the beginning that as long as there’s a need,” Kim said, “I’m going to keep flying.”

“One Good Thing” is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

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