

Westborough's 'Purse Project' brings joy to women across the region

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By Nance Ebert, Contributing Writer



Maureen Ambrosino, director of the Westborough Public Library and Nancy Wright, "volunteer extraordinaire", model some of the donated purses to be filled for The Purse Project. Photo/Nance Ebert

Westborough – A few years ago, someone posted a Facebook message in the Wicked Wise Women of Westborough group about filled purses being distributed to agencies in several neighboring towns. Maureen Ambrosino, director of the Westborough Public Library, saw the post and thought this was a terrific idea. She immediately decided to implement a way in which to help.

"I thought we could use the library as a 'drop off' for these gently used bags. I posted my idea but did not get much of a response at that time," Ambrosino said. "However, after the holidays had passed, I got an email from a woman named Nancy Wright, who I did not know, and in her subject heading she wrote 'bag lady' ... she expressed an interest in proceeding with this project if we would tackle it together. I accepted the challenge and we have really been able to make a difference in so many women's lives."

Initially, their mission was to collect empty purses to coincide with Women's History Month. With the library trustees' approval, they set up a collection box in the library and the gently used bags started pouring in. Once they realized there would be plenty of purses, the two women decided to go to phase two and ask for donated items as well.

"We thought it would be an even better idea to fill these purses with necessities – toiletries items like small bottles of shampoo, conditioner, soap, feminine products and more," Wright said. "Then, people started donating other niceties on their own like scarves and bracelets. We do our own quality control and anything that we wouldn't want to receive does not get included."

To date, the effort has collected over 700 bags, with 652 being donated thus far. Several businesses have adopted The Purse Project and have collected many bags for the cause.

"The Grafton Country Store's owner Carol Dauphinais has been awesome," Wright said. "I mentioned The Purse Project to her while shopping in the store. Lindsay Taylor from SPAtique did a collection last year and has reached out again. So many organizations are involved and our distribution list is extensive. We are so appreciative."

The Purse Project also had a wonderful response from the Civic Club, Friends of Westborough, and In Your Shoes, and has a dedicated group of volunteers.

Purses were also donated through the Free Holiday Store organized by Westborough Youth and Family Services and the Westborough Rotary. Last year, 117 purses were donated there.

The Purse Project recently accepted purses and filler items from the Women of St. Luke's Church. Vanderburgh House in Worcester, a facility that offers support for recovering addicts, also received filled purses.

The Purse Project needs small bottles of shampoo, deodorant, Chapstick, mittens, hats and conditioner. In addition, they would love to include \$10 gift cards to stores such as Target and Stop & Shop.

To find out how to donate, visit the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/purseprojectwestborough