



Madison-Park News (MI)

City observes Random Acts of Kindness Week, Feb. 15-21

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MADISON HEIGHTS - You and your fiancé are at a restaurant. Soon, a business trip will separate you for six weeks. You're feeling anxious, down.

Then the server comes with the bill, but snatches it from you and hands you a letter.

"There are too many random acts of violence in this world," it reads. "So I try to offset this with random acts of kindness. I'm not wealthy; I'm on Social Security disability. But you two are sitting next to each other, so I chose you young lovers. Have a great evening!"

The letter is signed, "A stranger." The mystery person paid your bill.

You look around for a man you noted observing you earlier, but he's gone.

That's what happened to Councilwoman Margene Scott and her husband back in 1995. As she and her then-fiancé grappled with the prospect of his looming trip to Brazil, the good deed lifted their spirits.

Unable to find the man so they could express their gratitude, they decided the best way to repay him was to do a kind act for someone else.

And so it spread. Scott pushed City Council to recognize Random Acts of Kindness Week, Feb. 15-21. The city has observed the national movement for 14 years now.

Perhaps you shovel snow for your neighbor or tell the employee at the fast-food drive-through that you're paying for the food ordered by the car behind you.

Maybe you craft a card for a stranger at a hospital or prep a care package for troops overseas. Or perhaps it's as simple as a note telling someone they're wonderful.

"It's the whole idea you've gone out of your way to do something ... to show your kindness, and for them to pass it on," Scott said. "It's supposed to have a ripple effect, your kind act rippling out in the water and those kind acts rippling out farther."

Scott said that occasionally her family would hang back and pick out people at restaurants who look down, and pay for their meals as the stranger originally did.

"It's funny to see the reaction," laughed Scott. "There was one older man, that when he left the restaurant, he kept looking in the window as he was leaving on the sidewalk, trying to see who may have done this for him, and we're cracking up."

According to Beaumont affiliated psychiatrist Dr. Howard **Belkin**, such acts have health benefits, as well.

"I've seen studies that show that when you do kind things for others, it decreases stress, increases endorphins and gives people what they call a 'rush of happiness,' and through that, it can create better health, reducing anxiety, improving mood," **Belkin** said. "And when people teach this to their children, it helps the children develop interpersonal skills, develop empathy and improve their own self esteem."

He said the desire to be kind is part of the human condition.

"To really be happy, you have to give and care for others because it feels good not to be isolated, and it feels good not to be selfish," **Belkin** explained. "Isolation is a really bad thing to feel; it's loneliness, a lack of connection with other people. And nobody really wants to be selfish; people want to be giving, want to help others and want to be empathetic to others. Doing these things really makes you feel good."

A sense of anonymity is key, **Belkin** said, as what often keeps people from being kind to strangers is a fear of being misjudged.

In the past, the city has helped facilitate random acts of kindness by distributing "kindness cards" via their Web site that people can pass on with each gesture. The cards ask the recipient to do a kind act themselves.

In addition, businesses have historically gotten onboard with Random Acts of Kindness Week, supplying free services to the disadvantaged or surprising customers with special treats.

All simple gestures, **Belkin** said, that add up.

"I think the most important thing out of the whole concept of doing nice things for other people is ... what seems to be an insignificant act for us can really be a turning point for another person," he said.

"If there's any reason for practicing random acts of kindness, it's that: You could really have a positive impact on someone's life."

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