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## COMMENTARY



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## Reaching out with diapers

In 2009, recently retired kindergarten teacher Pat Kennedy read for the first time about nonprofit diaper banks. She liked the idea so much she clipped the Time magazine article and tucked it away. She had the seed of an idea for the next phase of her life.

What struck Pat most about the subject of diapers was that food assistance programs for the poor — things like food stamps and WIC — don't cover the cost of them. She was really surprised.

Me, too.

I had two in diapers in the mid 1980s. I finally explained to the older child, not quite 2, that I couldn't afford diapers for two kids anymore. She was fresh out of luck, I explained. She'd use the Cinderella potty or have to live in the garage. She begrudgingly chose the potty after I pointed out she could not watch TV in the garage. That transition should have been more gentle, I know. So if she needs therapy later in life, I accept all blame.

"Diapers are such a basic need, and cost an average of \$100 a month, forcing parents in distressed circumstances to make tough choices between purchasing diapers, paying bills or buying groceries," Pat said.

She stressed that while cloth diapers may be environmentally preferable, they require access to laundry facilities and many coin-operated laundries do not allow patrons to use their machines to wash diapers. Add to that the fact that daycare facilities often require parents to provide disposable diapers to meet the needs of their children.

Pat has a second grandchild on the way next month. Her daughter can easily provide. It's not true of so many others who struggle to make ends meet while caring for babies.

So, when she retired from the

help. She has since founded the nonprofit Greater Philadelphia Diaper Bank, which for now is running out of half of the Richboro home she shares with her husband.

That's where donations of diapers will be stored, inventoried and from where Pat will deliver them to her nonprofit partners: MOMobile/Maternity Care Coalition ([www.momobile.org](http://www.momobile.org)); St. Vincent de Paul/Heart of Camden ([www.sacred-heartcamden](http://www.sacred-heartcamden)); The Bucks County Housing Group, Inc. ([www.bchg.org](http://www.bchg.org)); and The Interfaith Hospitality Network of Northwest Philadelphia ([www.philashelter.org](http://www.philashelter.org)).

She misses teaching. A lot, she said. But it was time to move on, and this new work of hers gives her meaningful purpose. And some anxiety as she negotiates the learning curve. "I'm just a schoolteacher," she said with a gentle laugh. She's been doing lots of reading and lots of networking to find her way.

As luck would have it, Pat learned she had a readymade contact in Detroit, where she is originally from. It was Marybeth Levine, who was active in a diaper bank in that city — the very first diaper bank ever founded. And it turned out that Marybeth's mom lived in the Philadelphia area. Bingo! It was a brain to pick for ideas and direction.

Recently, a member of Pat's book club, Nancy Siefert of Riverton, Burlington County, convinced her employer, Kling Stubbins, a Philadelphia architectural, engineering and interior design firm, to do a diaper drive. It'll be held by the interiors department of the company.

There has been a promise from a Curves gym to help in the spring. Pat and her advisory board are busy reaching out to schools and Scouting groups, too. She's hoping the idea of collecting diapers for mom's in need will appeal to women's groups, book and garden clubs and more businesses, too.

"Our ability to help our partners depends on community involvement. Right now, we are spreading the word," she said. She asked if I'd put out the call, and I'm happy to do it.

If you'd like to help in some way, big or small, drop Pat a note at [pat@philadelphidiaperbank.org](mailto:pat@philadelphidiaperbank.org) or call 215- 919-8500.

Pat's keeping her fingers crossed that you'll consider holding a diaper drive. She'll pick up the diapers when the drive is concluded and can provide tax receipts for donations.

How about it?

Kate Fratti's column appears on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.