

Fill 'Er Up

By Kevin Fritz

FuelMySchool, an Orlando-based program makes wishes come true and brings resources to public schools.

Saddened and alarmed by stories such as a freshman cut from the football team because the school ran out of helmets, **Lisa Hilgenfeldt** believed it was time to bring the resources of the masses and the public school system together. Launched by Hilgenfeldt and her sister, **Krista Monteleone**, FuelMySchool helps schools meet the needs of their students.

“It’s a little outside the box,” the mother of four Orange County public school students admits. But she says raising money via door-to-door sales of chocolate bars and wrapping paper is not the answer. “I knew there had to be a better way.”

In less than a year, the non-profit has registered 190 public schools in **Orange County** and has begun to add **Seminole County** schools into the fold. Each school receives its own page on the FuelMySchool website to post wishes, and the site tracks how much the school earns.

MySchoolWish is the flagship program of FuelMySchool and Hilgenfeldt boasts that more than 130 wishes have been granted, some as simple as a need for socks at Orange Center Elementary. Besides MySchoolWish, the online tool offers three other proprietary programs, including Shop4Schools, in which online shopping with 200-plus nationally known retailers earns cash rewards for schools; Cars4Schools that donates money via car sales to students; and Cash4Schools, a direct PayPal donation to specific schools.

Since its inception, close to \$15,000 worth of MySchoolWishes were granted at participating schools, more than \$1,000 has been earned from Shop4Schools, and \$200 was presented to Dr. Phillips High School through the Cars4Schools program.

Its simplicity is its key to success: A school registers with FuelMySchool and posts its wishes or needs. The community then visits the website and fulfills the wishes.

Moreover, FuelMySchool is designed to allow any school in any state to actively participate in the program. In fact, Hilgenfeldt says there are a handful of out-of-state schools already registered on the site. She agrees FuelMySchool has the potential of becoming a national phenomenon, but that is not her goal. “If it just supports my community,” she says, “I am just as happy. We pride



Alessandra Capasso shows off donated dollhouse furniture with pre-K vision teacher Angela Tanner at Princeton Elementary.

COURTESY OF KELLY ROBERTS

ourselves as being a vehicle for the community.”

Kelly Roberts, who coordinates FuelMySchool for Princeton Elementary and updates its Web page, says she can’t post items fast enough. “We get so many wishes granted,” she says. “It is wonderful. I love it, love it, love it.” The school was granted 10 wishes in one week, ranging from ink to tennis balls.

Roberts says extraordinary parent support is what makes the program work. Frangus Elementary School dean of students **Riki Smith** says his school has benefitted mostly from the online shopping tool. “The program works because as a coordinator I do not have to do much to generate some income,” he notes. He says sending e-mails, creating fliers and posting wishes on the website takes little work. With the money generated from Shop4Schools, Smith receives a check from FuelMySchool, putting the funds toward supplies, or programs that reward students such as pizza parties.

His wish is that the initiative becomes a household name and people begin to regularly donate to districts outside of their own. “Maybe there is someone who has a picnic table to donate, but doesn’t know that we need one,” he explains. “We just have to get the word out. After all, it’s all about the kids.” **L**

To find out more about FuelMySchool or to donate, please visit CentralFloridalifestyle.com.