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Take a Bow: Polk Place residents make a difference

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Residents of Polk Place, a Franklin subdivision, believe in making a difference. In fact, they have been involved with Make a Difference Day for five years and this year's event in October will be their sixth.

And for their project last year, they were recognized in an April USA Weekend magazine story highlighting "difference makers" across the country.

"USA Weekend called me to find out more about what we did. They said they really liked that it was young people that were involved," Toni Themis, a Polk Place resident and retiree who helps organize the annual event for her neighborhood of about 355 families.

Her history with Make a Difference Day started far from Franklin.

Themis used to help organize the Make a Difference Day with the Greater Federation of Women's Club in Illinois. There, she said, it was more of a statewide project and her Women's Club even made the top 10 and received \$10,000 for their charity.

When she moved to Franklin she thought it would be a good idea to try and get her community involved in the Make a Difference Day.

"It's a good way to get people working together in the community and working for a common cause," she said. And she hopes that one day soon, Polk Place will make the top 10 too.

So what made last year's project so special it received national attention? When trying to come up with last year's Make a Difference Day project, Themis said the idea the young people in the neighborhood came up with on their own was a winner.

The youth had a friend in Polk Place who passed away from cancer at the young age of 15. The teens decided to organize a car wash for Make a Difference Day and then donated the proceeds to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and to the Stehlin Foundation for Cancer Research, which conducts research on the rare type of cancer that he had. She added that the younger kids were also involved and went to three nursing homes in the area and visited with and entertained the people there.

But that wasn't all they did. She noted that the teens, along with committee members, collected items from the community and donated them to Graceworks Ministries, which was collecting items for the Red Cross for Hurricane Katrina victims. They also collected pet supplies and pet food to help with the animals that had been abandoned in the hurricane.

"The whole neighborhood gets behind it. It brings us together," Themis said of the special work day.

Make a Difference Day takes place on the last Saturday of October.

Looking ahead, Themis and the Polk Place Make A Difference Day committee is already working on this year's special day.

While she wouldn't say what they are planning, she did share that the neighborhood will be working for Habitat for Humanity and New Hope Academy.

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