

Pay It Forward Movement News

THE WINNER IS:

Mrs. Lisa Burgess's 6th grade class, Golden Elementary School, Placentia, CA

This is their letter of nomination, submitted by Mary Beth Tang, mother of one of the 35 students:

Mrs. Lisa Burgess's 6th-grade class raised approximately \$1,500 in one day for the family of a handicapped student whose house had burned down—all with the student's own money. When Mrs. Burgess told the class of the news that the Bamber family had lost their home as well as the family pets in an electrical fire, and that they had no homeowner's insurance, she suggested to them to take action to help the family. This is part of her ongoing teachings to do life service work to lead fulfilling lives. The class brainstormed the idea of donating \$1 to \$5 each. Instead, on the following day, one boy came to class with his mom and had her write a check from his savings account for all the money he had saved to date: \$250!! He said he was waiting to find something special to spend the money on, and this was it. The effect snowballed from there: the next child cleaned out his account of \$166, the next brought in \$50, some brought in \$5, some sought out donations from other classes. Not only did they raise \$1,500, the students brought in gift certificates for retail stores that they hadn't yet used. They went to local merchants, speaking with store managers to arrange donations to the family, including free meal certificates from local restaurants. When the mother of the handicapped student was notified of the charity and came to pick up the money she was overwhelmed with emotion. Little had the students known, the family had to come up with \$1,000 by week's end to pay a utility fee—money that they didn't have. As a mother of one of the students in Lisa Burgess's class I cannot convey in words how grateful I am to have a woman of such love and integrity teaching my child such valuable lessons. My son was BEAMING with pride, and I was moved to tears. I hereby nominate Lisa Burgess's 6th grade class for the Pay it Forward award.

Thank you,
Mary Beth Tang



Catherine Ryan Hyde (with flowers given to her by the children) and Lisa Burgess with her sixth grade class of 2000/2001. Mrs Burgess is holding the plaque presented by the Pay It Forward Foundation.



The class with a blow-up of the award check

Paying It Forward Pays Off Placentia Class's Generosity Earns National Award

By KEITH SHARON

Orange County Register

PLACENTIA

The sixth-grader emptied his bank account.

All \$250. For Ben Vail, 12, that's Xbox money with enough left over for a new baseball bat. His mom offered to pay half, but Ben refused. This had to be his money.

His to give away.

Ben and his classmates, inspired by an enthusiastic teacher, learned a lesson about the far-reaching impact of compassion, and a Brea family learned that a group of kids has the power to change lives.

In the 48 hours after a fire gutted the Brea home of special-education student Kenny Bamber in March, the 40 kids in Lisa Burgess' class at Golden Elementary raised \$1,500. They collected dozens of bags of clothes, groceries, toys and games and persuaded several businesses to donate gift certificates to help the Bammers.

Today, Burgess' 2001 sixth-grade class will come together again to accept the first Pay It Forward Foundation Award, a \$2,000 grant to Golden Elementary that the school will use to buy new library books. The award was inspired by the novel and film "Pay It Forward," in which a teacher challenges a student to try to change the world.

The 12-year-old character named Trevor comes up with a plan: Help three people, and instead of getting them to pay you back, ask them to pay it forward—help three more people.

The novel's author, Catherine Ryan Hyde, will present the award in a noon ceremony at the school. She chose Golden Elementary as the foundation's first winner from about 500 entries across the nation. Some raised more money. Some worked longer and harder on their projects.

But at Golden, the students used their own money, and that touched Hyde.

Frank Kane made his mother drive him to the bank and withdraw all of his \$166. Wesley Heuler decided not to go on a Boy Scout camping trip so he and his father could help the Bammers rebuild their home. Everyone contributed something.

Burgess gave the donations, without fanfare, to a secretary at George Key School, a campus for severely handicapped students. Kenny, 15, has Down syndrome. The secretary passed the goods along to the Bamber family. Burgess' intent was to teach the lesson that the giving itself was the reward.

"Part of the lesson is that we don't expect anything in return," Burgess said.

But it turned out there would be more to the lesson. Not only did the Bammers find out where the help came from, the gesture was nominated for a national award.

And it won.

"Their project reminded me the most of Trevor McKinney (the boy in the novel)," Hyde said. "I want the Pay It Forward award to be something that can be won on heart. Every aspect of what this class did gives me goose-bumps."

The Bamber fire started in the garage.



MELODIE YBARRA hugs kids from Lisa Burgess' current class, which raised money for her family. Burgess' class from last year won a national award - Photo -Bruce Strong / The Register

Kenny's dog, Morgana, had given birth to 12 puppies, and the Bambers put a floor heater in the garage to keep the dogs warm. On March 21, the heater shorted and caught fire.

It was Morgana's last bark, Nancy Bamber said, that woke the family up and saved their lives. Kenny, his brother, Richard, and parents Nancy and Ken got out alive.

"My Mom and Dad were screaming," Kenny said. "They were scared. I smelled it. I thought I was going to die. I jumped out the window. People saw my underwear."

Morgana and all the puppies died.

The Bambers, who have lived in the house for 10 years, were caught without fire insurance. A new mortgage company had taken over their loan and mistakenly dropped the family's fire insurance, Nancy Bamber said. They had been trying to save money and so didn't resume paying the premiums.

The next day at school, Lisa Burgess heard about the fire. Burgess is the kind of teacher who can laugh about getting pelted with water balloons, which her class did to her last year. She has a life-size cutout of Austin Powers in her classroom. She is the kind of teacher who hugs and laughs and tapes a picture of herself in sixth grade on the wall.

She is also the kind of teacher who teaches character. In Burgess' class, character is just as important as math, English and history. Last year, she asked her students to volunteer pushing wheelchairs and feeding students at George Key School. That's where some of them got to know Kenny.

"Other people might turn their heads away," Burgess said. "But instead of showing pity, which gets you nowhere, I want them to think—Let's do something."

The morning after the fire, Burgess asked her class to come up with a way to help.

When Mary Beth Tang picked up her son—Frank Kane—that afternoon, he told her he was going to donate \$5. Then he thought about it overnight. The next day, he asked his mom to take him to the bank. When he got home with all his savings, he and Ben Vail went to Home Town Buffet and persuaded the manager to donate a gift certificate.

"I am so happy that my son had a teacher like Lisa," Tang said. "She has made a mark, and it is going to stick. She goes beyond an academic curriculum and serves them soul food."

Tang nominated her son's class for the Pay It Forward award after seeing the foundation mentioned when she rented the movie video.

When Kenny Bamber returned to school two days after the fire, he was called to the office. When he entered, he saw 50 bags of clothes, groceries, toys and games.

He dropped to his knees and held out his arms as if he could embrace all the things people had given him.

"All for me?" he asked.

All of it.

"I was so happy," Kenny said. "They're my best friends now. It was so cool."

When Nancy Bamber was called to the school a week later, she was a little upset that no one told her why.

When she arrived, she saw all the donations—so many bags and boxes, she still, a year later, hasn't opened them all.

Then someone told her about the kids from Burgess' class.

"There were a whole bunch of emotions," Bamber said. "That class gave us a start on our life again."

She found her way to Burgess' class.

"I didn't know what to say, so I cried," Bamber said. "What wonderful people those kids are growing up to be."

Burgess cried, too. But Burgess always cries. Her kids continually make her emotional. The Bambers used the cash donations to buy an electrical pole to restore power to their home.

Two days later, Wesley Heuler and his father, John, went to the Bamber home in stead of Scout camp and volunteered to clean up.

"I believed it was more right to help other people than to go have fun, Wesley Heuler said.

The Pay It Forward lesson seems to have worked. .

This year, when four members of the Ybarra family of Placentia were killed in a fire, Burgess' new class of sixth-graders held a parking-lot sale to raise money.

"Kids are every bit as capable as grownups—and I think they're even better at some respects—to look at the world and see what's wrong," Hyde said.

"When people get to the point where the world is too bleak, they can read stories like the one at Golden elementary," Hyde said.

Education: Golden Elementary students receive national recognition and see their donations matched.

By Keith Sharon

Orange County Register

PLACENTIA

If the students at Golden Elementary School needed an example of how their generosity had inspired others, they found it Friday.

On the day that last year's 6th-grade class was honored with the first Pay It Forward Foundation award, the school learned that an anonymous donor followed the students' example and promised \$1,500 to Melody Ybarra, the only surviving member of a Placentia family whose lives were taken in a fire. The \$1500 donation matched what the Golden students raised mostly from their own bank accounts for a Brea family whose house burned.

"You've probably inspired people in places you've never been or may never go," said author Catherine Ryan Hyde, whose novel "Pay It Forward" is about a student who devises a plan to make the world a better place by doing good deeds for others. "today, you raised another \$1,500, and you didn't even know it."

About 100 students, parents and school officials met in the school's multipurpose room Friday to cheer last year's 6th-grade class and their teacher, Lisa Burgess.

Last March, the home of special-education student Kenny Bamber was gutted by fire. In the two days after the fire, several members of Burgess' class emptied their bank accounts, collected gift certificates from local businesses and gathered food and clothes to give to the Bamber family.

Hyde, whose novel became a movie starring Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and Haley Joel Osment, presented the school with a check for \$2,000 that will be used to buy new library books.

Burgess, a popular teacher who works lessons about character and philanthropy into her curriculum, gave a tearful talk after receiving the award.

"All I did was ask them, 'Who's going to step up to the plate?'" she said.



KENNY BAMBER HUGS Golden Elementary School teacher Lisa Burgess after she and her students received an award for charity work

-Photo.-Andy Templeton/For The Register