

Students put the Giving back in Thanksgiving -- one pancake breakfast at a time



By Brock Weir

For some families, Thanksgiving is all about the turkey dinner, but Meghan and Jack Beswick have something else in mind ? a good, old fashioned pancake breakfast.

While others in the community are rooting around grocery stores for that last-minute turkey or a forgotten fixing, the Aurora siblings are busily packing boxes laden with pancake batter, maple syrup, fruit, and even a spatula and apron, to make sure others in the community share the joy while helping a good cause.

The duo ? along with their elder sister Kate? are spearheading PJ's & Pancakes At Home, a fundraising initiative benefiting the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario. (POGO)

The Beswicks are no strangers to flipping a few flapjacks, having recruited a number of their peers to help in a pancake cookout for the same cause at Town Park last year, but this year they are doubling down on their fundraising efforts and letting people enjoy the warmth from the comforts of their own home.

?Last year, we had a really great event out in the park, but this year we wanted to do something different while maintaining the aspects of it being a pancake breakfast with your family in your pyjamas,? says Meghan.

Enter the Pancake Box.

Once the Beswicks decided what they wanted to do for their family fundraising project this year, they set out to work building boxes with everything you need for the perfect pancake breakfast. They reached out to companies like Bulk Barn and Betty Crocker for contributions, and the result is a box that includes pancake batter, maple syrup, a spatula, apron, coffee, juice, water, fresh fruit, and if you're lucky enough to get a mystery surprise in your box, maybe an iPhone X courtesy of Rogers, or Maple Leaf tickets.

Each box is available for a \$50 minimum donation, with all proceeds going directly to POGO.

?The box will give you everything you need to make that pancake breakfast with your family, so no matter where you are, who you are spending Thanksgiving with, you have an opportunity to sit down and share a meal and talk about things like POGO.?

The Beswicks say that as soon as they told people their initiative was benefiting a cause like POGO, they were immediately on board. The siblings had an instant connection with the children's cancer organization because the ones who receive their services are their peers.

?For us, pyjamas and pancakes means a warm hug on a Saturday morning,? says Meghan. ?Working with POGO was really special because we've done other projects, but we are kids and we're doing this for people our age in Ontario who are living in our neighbourhood and our communities. We can't even remotely relate to the experiences they have to go through. [The more we learned] the more we wanted to do something.?

Adds Jack: ?When we tell people about it, a lot of them are right on board. They love the cause and they usually ask to help. I have had a ton of texts from people these guys helped last year, and they helped us do it in the park last year.?

Running the event themselves also opens doors with their friends and classmates, they say, because it's a collaborative process. Any ideas or additional perspectives on how to improve the project are always welcome, they say.

?It is special because POGO is so dedicated to kids and we are just kids putting together events, that we are able to connect with

those effected by cancer at a different kind of level that a lot of adults who run POGO events doo.?

?It's also really fun to do,? adds Jack, ?and it also helps me realise how fortunate we are that some other kids go through this. We can't even remotely relate to what they're going through, but this helps us understand.?

By this past weekend, Jack, Mehgan and their friends Callum Arnott and Quinlan Goring had an efficient assembly line going, folding boxes in their garage, stocking the boxes in their dining room, and stacking them up for delivery in their front hall.

While most families are in cleaning mode preparing to welcome relatives for the Thanksgiving dinner, mom Dawn Beswick says she doesn't mind the chaos going on.

?It's a lot of work, the house is a disaster, our living room, our garage, but I like it,? says Dawn. ?(Husband) Dave and I have always given back and have been involved in something in the community and it is very, very important to us. We feel that if you can, you should. The kids are in that position, too. They have done a great job and we're super proud of them.?

For more information on the PJs & Pancakes at Home Initiative, including how to donate towards a pancake box, or perhaps even make a donation to POGO in general, visit pjsandpancakes2018.wixsite.com/mysite. Boxes can be picked up before Thanksgiving or delivered directly by the volunteers. For more on the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, visit POGO.ca.