

AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE SERVING AND CONNECTING THE RESIDENTS OF FAIR HAVEN, NJ

# FAIR HAVEN

L I V I N G

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## THE DERMER FAMILY: FIGHTING HUNGER ONE BAG AT A TIME

COVER PHOTO BY  
MARNIE DOHERTY



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# THE DERMER FAMILY: FIGHTING HUNGER ONE BAG AT A TIME

BY MARIE BIRO / PHOTOS BY MARNIE DOHERTY PHOTOGRAPHY  
AND PROVIDED BY THE DERMER FAMILY



**T**he Dermer Family is on a mission. No one should be hungry. Through their non-profit organization, Dermer Dreams, they fight hunger one bag at a time.

Dermer Dreams is gearing up to collect over 50,000 pounds of food. Over the weekend of November 14th and 15th, Dermer Dreams will hold both a town-wide food drive in Fair Haven as well as a student-led "Neighborhood Captain" food drive across Monmouth County. They will rely on Fair Haven residents and 300 student volunteers to accomplish their goal.

In the coming weeks, all 2150 residents in Fair Haven will receive bright yellow Dermer Dreams donation bags accompanied by a list of items desperately

needed at the Monmouth County food banks. All residents have to do is fill their Dermer Dreams donation bag with food items and leave it on their doorsteps. On Saturday, November 14th, Dermer Dreams trucks will stop at each home in Fair Haven to collect the donation bags and deliver

them to the Dermer Dreams headquarters at the Fair Haven Firehouse. The food donations will be packed on Move for Hunger trucks and delivered to various Monmouth County food banks, including Lunch Break, The Backpack Crew, and HabCore.

"My goal is to simplify the donation process so that people who want to give have a simple way to do it," says Dan Dermer.

Collecting 50,000 pounds of food in one weekend might seem like an ambitious goal, but Dermer Dreams knows it is achievable. Last year, during their inaugural 2019 town-wide food drive, Dermer Dreams collected 24,633 pounds of food from Fair Haven residents. In recognition of this 2019 achievement, Dermer Dreams was awarded an official Town Proclamation from Mayor Benjamin Lucarelli. Dermer Dreams was named a founding member of Lunch Break's Circle of Hope, Gold Level Sponsor. Move for Hunger, a national non-profit organization, ranked Dermer Dreams #7 in New Jersey food drives in 2019. This is an impressive achievement for their first Dermer Dreams food drive in Fair Haven.

According to the Dermers, they couldn't have launched this effort in a better place than Fair Haven. "We were overwhelmed by the support of the entire town in 2019. Everyone from the residents, the Mayor, the Town Council, the Fire Department, and the local businesses were there for us every step of the way. What is amazing about Fair Haven is that when the residents are presented an opportunity to give to someone less fortunate than them, they step up to the plate," says Alyse. "We saw it firsthand with our 2019 food drive, and again when COVID-19 hit. During the pandemic, food bank needs increased by 56%, so we launched an appeal for Lunch Break on social media and raised over \$13,000 in a week."

This year, Dermer Dreams is mobilizing the student population through their new Neighborhood Captain program. 300 students have signed up to run their own Dermer Dreams Food Drives in their respective towns. Dermer Dreams delivered one-hundred donation bags to each student, who will independently pick up and deliver food donations to the Dermer Dreams headquarters on Sunday, November 15th.



The Neighborhood Captain Program is a turn-key solution for students who need to do charity work. Dermer Dreams provides the tools, support, and donation bags and the students manage their own food drive from start to finish. The student is responsible to run the food drive to deliver as much food as possible. Upon delivery of the food, the student gains charity hours to meet the requirements for school organizations as well as university applications.

"My plan is for the youth across our country to take on the hunger problem and solve it," says Dan Dermer. "I've seen what this generation is capable of accomplishing through grass-roots social media campaigns and their command of



aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, when Dan and Alyse Dermer, and their children Reyna and Brendan, were displaced from their Sea Bright home. Dan, who has run a property management firm in New York City for the last twenty-eight years, realized that he could use his resources in New York City to quickly collect food. "When Sandy hit, we wanted to find a way to get food and clothing to the people who were displaced from their homes and in shelters," says Dan. "Dermer Dreams created an easy, no hassle donation method that delivered food and clothing directly from the doorsteps of homes to the people who needed it most." Since 2012, Dermer Dreams has collected and distributed over 70,000 pounds of food through various food drives.

Dan Dermer has been looking for a way to give back to the community since childhood. He credits his parents, Burt and Beatrice, with teaching him to be generous and compassionate. He tells this story: When I was ten years old, I went to a banquet room



with my mom. There were one-hundred elderly people there. My mother was serving them food and they were playing music and having a great day. I thought my Mom was crazy that she wanted to hang out with elderly people. I was standing in the corner when a man walked up to me and asked if I knew what my mom was doing. I said no, and he told me, "Your mother organizes this so that these elderly people can have a home-cooked meal and place to come and laugh and smile for the day." I asked the man if it was her job and if she made money from it, and he said, "No, she does this out of the kindness

technology. With the right students leading the charge, we can work together to fight hunger."

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of her heart so the older people can have a day filled with smiles." The man walked away from Dan that day and said, Son, you have a special mother. His mother continues to serve as his inspiration for helping others in all of his charitable endeavors.

Dan's father, Burt, raised him with a strong belief that everyone in this world should have an equal amount and always advised Dan to help people who were less fortunate than he was.

Dan and Alyse are proud to leave this legacy to their children. They believe that empathy and compassion are among the most important values to impart to their kids. Alyse says that Reyna and Brendan didn't entirely grasp the gravity of the situation or the mission of their food drives until one night when they went to Dan's office in New York City to stuff donation bags with resident letters for an upcoming food drive. Brendan says, "We walked out of my Dad's office and he walked us over to a homeless man sleeping in a cardboard box. My Dad turned to us and said, do you know that this man will sleep here tonight and will not have any food to eat."

Both Reyna and Brendan cried the whole drive home from the city. They went to bed trying to process how that same man could still be out there in the freezing cold with nothing to eat. Something changed that night when they suddenly had a clear picture of who they were helping with the Dermer Dreams food drives. It was always fun for them to get on the trucks and sort food when they were little, but now it had taken



on a new meaning. At twelve & ten years old, Reyna and Brendan now take an active role in the charity and love doing anything that will lead to more food being collected.

According to Dan and Alyse, their children's

creativity is inspiring, and they are proud that they have adopted a compassionate way of life. "They are the future of Dermer Dreams. We want them to inspire young people across the country," Dan says.

Reyna, a seventh grader at Knollwood School, is a travel softball player for the Fair Haven Diamonds and loves to sing at the School of Rock. She can be seen on the Dermer Dreams website interviewing volunteers in a video made at the 2019 food drive.

Brendan, in fifth grade at Knollwood School, plays travel basketball for Mid-Monmouth and travel baseball for the Cage Academy. Brendan also did a video showing the residents how the actual food drive works. He once had an incredible vision for Dermer Dreams' future. Last Fall, while planning the 2019 food drive, he noticed that NFL football players were all wearing pink for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. He turned to his Dad and said, "Imagine when we get all these students to sign up for Dermer Dreams that the NCAA would wear our yellow colors to fight hunger across the country." Brendan went on to explain that these are the students of the NCAA so they should want to partner with us. Dan has not forgotten about this since.

Beyond the Dermer Dreams organization, Dan and Alyse Dermer are dedicated to their children and their love of sports and music. Dan has coached his children in travel softball, baseball, soccer, and basketball,

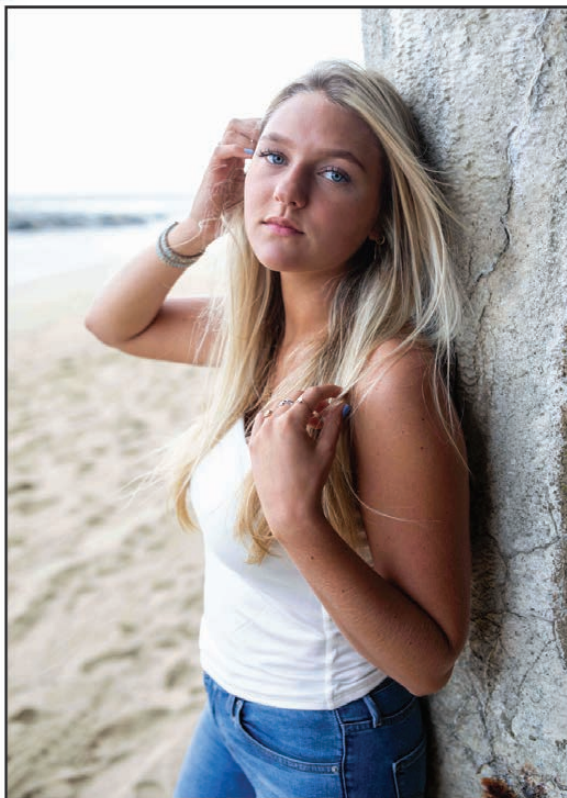
and plays rhythm guitar in a band. Alyse, who was a Wall Street recruiter for twenty-five years, is putting her immense professional skill set to work at Dermer Dreams. "Alyse plays the most important role at Dermer Dreams," says Dan. "Her ability to network and nurture relationships is integral to our success I know twenty-five people, but Alyse knows twenty-five-hundred."

Dan & Alyse first met in high school in Freehold Township when they were fourteen years old. They dated for a year in high school and they broke up. They dated again during their junior year in college, when Alyse attended George Washington University and Dan attended American University in Washington, D.C., before they broke up. They reunited 15 years later in their mid thirties and were married. Dan and Alyse joke that the key to a good marriage is to take a fifteen-year break in the middle. It worked for us.

"We are blessed to live in this special place called Fair Haven," Dan and Alyse say, recalling the abundance of yellow bags townspeople filled in 2019. "We were truly moved to witness the level of community support and we thank all of you! We are looking forward to making Fair Haven the hub for the 2020 Dermer Dreams Food Drive and to reach our goal of 50,000 pounds of food between all of our food drives."



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