

Flourtown boys collect donations, food for nonprofit pet organization

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While most kids would say the best part of having their own birthday party is the presents, brothers Jack and Luke Sharpe, of Flourtown, would say otherwise.

Instead of asking for presents this year, they wanted to lend a helping hand — or paw — with keeping their favorite four-legged friends out of shelters and with their loving families.

With one cat and dog at home, the two brothers love animals. While planning for their joint birthday party, Jack, 9, and Luke, 7, decided they didn't need anything for their birthday and wanted to give back.



“We don't need more presents,” Jack said. “I wanted to help dogs and cats instead.”

Being fortunate enough to financially support the health problems of Fred, their cat, Jack and Luke said they realized how lucky they are to be able to take care of him and wanted to help others do the same.

“I love my cat and my dog,” Luke said. “And I don't want animals to hurt anymore.”

As a result, their mother, Debra Sharpe, researched online and asked community members for different local organizations and charities that would help animals. While browsing suggestions on Facebook, she came across Sam's Hope, a local nonprofit pet organization that helps those who struggle with financially supporting their pet's needs.

Inspired by her Shitzu, Sam, who passed away in 2012, founder Marianne Iaquinto wondered how she could assist other pet owners dealing with severe medical issues that may not be as fortunate.

“I wanted to help others from having to put their pets in shelters,” Iaquinto added. “Especially due to the high cost of veterinary care and pet supplies.”

As a result, she created Sam's Hope to provide financial assistance for medical issues and pet supplies for struggling families, particularly in Delaware, Bucks and Montgomery counties.

"I was really impressed with their mission, and it just seemed like a good fit," Debra said.

So, April 12, Jack and Luke had their charitable birthday party at the local sports center; in lieu of birthday presents, the brothers asked for pet food and donations that would help go toward veterinary costs for pets in need. The support they received, however, was nothing they could have imagined.

They raised over \$210 at the party alone, with a supporter of Sam's Hope doubling their proceeds to a grand total of \$420. In addition, they packed their trunk to the brim with over 124 pounds of pet food.

While they had a few dozen classmates and friends at the birthday party, they received tremendous support from their surrounding community as well.

"Even people that couldn't make it to the party contributed, along with teachers and people from my work," Debra says. "It kind of morphed into a bigger thing that was really amazing."

For their generosity and kindness, Iaquinto awarded Jack and Luke with certificates of appreciation, along with fake "checks" the boys could use to truly donate in their own name to Sam's Hope.

"I was really surprised by how much they were able to collect," Marianne said. "They are incredibly kind, and I would love to work with them again next year."

Their charitable spirit has been an inspiration for the entire community, and they don't plan on stopping any time soon.

"Even though it was in April, they're already planning their next birthday," Debra said laughing.

Participating in the local pet food drive, Jack and Luke strive to continue helping other pets stay with their families and out of shelters.

"I just felt like I made a big change," Jack said.

"And it made me really happy — more than presents would," Luke said.