

Fill the Cart, Then Fill the Cruiser



The parking lot at the Harris Teeter on Harrison Street has been cordoned off for cars to deliver food for AFAC and diapers for Doorways for Women and Children.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
THE CONNECTION

The temperature is approaching 90 degrees at 5 p.m. Friday. Thomas and Benjamin Gross and their father Matt wheel a grocery cart across the parking lot at Harris Teeter on Harrison Street headed for the ACPD Fill the Cruiser drive.

Six-year-old Benjamin pulls out a can from the cart. "See this is low-sugar fruit cocktail."

And his nine-year-old brother adds, "This is low sugar toasted oats cereal, and I got a can of low-fat spicy chicken noodle soup with jalapenos." He explains they spent around \$100 "before my dad used the coupons."

Matt explains that Benjamin was just mentioning he wanted to go to a food drive and "then I saw this Fill the Cruiser for Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) and Doorways." Matt says they used to go to food drives when they lived in New York pre-Covid when the kids were in preschool. But he says, "We never went to a food drive in a parking lot or with the police cruisers."

Corporal J.P. Montoya stacks up diapers for Doorways for Women and Families and boxes of cereal from the shopping cart and heads for the police truck. Montoya is part of the Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) Community Engagement unit that hosts the Fill the Cruiser events throughout the



Corporal A.P. Montoya assists Matt Gross who, with Thomas and Benjamin, has filled a grocery cart for the ACPD Fill the Cruiser event May 20.



Six-year-old Benjamin proudly holds up his can of low-sugar fruit for the AFAC food drive.



Nine-year-old Thomas shows his specially selected spicy low-fat chicken noodle soup with jalapenos for the Fill the Cruiser event.

year for school supplies, holiday presents and the local food pantry.

Lt. Luke Haglof is supervising the event and he observes they have five boxes of contributions but the donations seem down so far this afternoon. Montoya observes, "Food

is expensive. A lot of people only have one person working right now. Food that used to cost \$35 is now \$70, and they can't afford it."

Tomorrow Montoya will be attending the Festival de Familia, a community event where he has

been invited to participate. He explains this is the goal of the ACPD Community Engagement unit, to become a part of the community in a way that makes people feel comfortable with the police. "Building up trust takes time."

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE