



Alexa Spar

Project Bell earns recognition from Town

By Kris DiLorenzo

The Town of Greenburgh has honored Ardsley High School senior Alexa Spar with a Certificate of Recognition for her work as Project Bell co-president (with her older sister Isabella, AHS Class of 2022).

"When I found out that I was going to be recognized by the Greenburgh Town Council," Alexa Spar told the Enterprise on Aug. 28, "I was extremely excited and honored. Since presenting at the town meeting, I am very appreciative to say that it has created several opportunities for Project Bell to share our mission."

At the board's June 28 meeting, the 17-year-old delivered an overview of the project and updated the board on its progress.

Isabella Spar founded the nonprofit Project Bell in 2016, when she was 12 and Alexa 10, to donate "New Beginning" bells to cancer and later, to transplant centers. Spar's

inspiration was a bell-ringing ceremony that summer at Massachusetts General Hospital, where their mother, Wendy Jeshion, a pediatric gastroenterologist, was undergoing proton radiation for a life-threatening brain tumor. Patients rang a special bell at the conclusion of treatment, signifying accomplishment, celebration, and new beginnings. Jeshion rang hers after six weeks.

Few hospitals or cancer centers had bells, so the girls began fundraising, initially by making and selling bracelets and necklaces, but the project is now supported by monetary donations. So far, Project Bell has raised about \$30,000, providing 110 bells in the continental U.S., Canada, Chile, Tunisia, and the Virgin Islands; institutions in England and Australia are also interested.

At home, the project has donated bells to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer centers in Manhattan and Basking Ridge, New Jersey; the Children's Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx; Massachusetts General Hospi-

tal Cancer Center in Boston; John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack University Medical Center, New Jersey; Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern; and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. The Spars estimate that every year approximately 120,000 people ring one of the project's bells, signifying a new chance at life.

Isabella Spar, 19, is now a sophomore at Tulane University in New Orleans, a health and wellness major with a minor in public health on the pre-health track, which prepares students for medical, dental, and physical therapy schools. Her plan is to become a physician assistant. "I have always been drawn to careers where I get to help people and have always loved science and medicine," she explained.

While Isabella works mostly on answering emails, spreading the word about their work, and reaching out to cancer centers,

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Project Bell

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Alexa oversees Project Bell's daily operations.

After Dell Seton Medical Center in Austin inquired about finding a similar organization that would donate bells to organ transplant centers, in early 2022 Project Bell expanded to include such centers. Dell Seton wanted two types of bells: one for recipients after they take their first lap around the hospital, another for organ donors to ring as they head into the operating room.

The first transplant bell rang in October 2022; Project Bell has since donated six more in Texas, Oklahoma, New Jersey, and Kentucky.

The bell-ringing tradition started in 1996 at MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas in Austin. Irve De Moyne, a patient and a rear admiral in the U.S. Navy, donated the first bell in order to follow the Navy tradition of ringing a bell after a task is successfully completed.

The bells — large, brass nautical instruments, usually manufactured in Italy — are wall mounted, and each has an inscribed plaque, different for cancer centers and transplant programs. Each bell-ringing ceremony is unique, but all signify reaching a milestone, and friends and family are welcome. Patients first read the inscription, then ring the bell, announcing their accomplishment.

"A lot of thought was devoted to finding inspirational quotes for the patients to recite that represented their journey," Alexa Spar noted. The plaque for cancer patients is inscribed with De Moyne's original poem: "Ring this bell/ Three times well/ Its toll will clearly say/ My treatment is done/ The course is run/ And I am on my way."

The transplant bell plaque for organ recipients bears a quote attributed to Martin Luther King Jr.: "Take the first



Alexa Spar with the daughters of the man who first rang the bell at the Ascension Seton Medical Center in Austin, Texas.

step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." The living-donor bell plaque reads: "Donating is a sacred exchange that fundamentally transforms and opens a part of you that you didn't know existed, to show you a better way to live." An employee of Dell Seton contributed those words.

"The project has a lot of help from ambassadors who spread the word and can also help with any language barriers," Alexa Spar noted. "One ambassador from Chile learned

about the project after her mother rang a bell at Memorial Sloan Kettering; another ambassador, who works for Ascension Seton Medical Center in Austin, is a kidney donor who helps spread the word about Project Bell Transplant." Project Bell has donated 10 bells to Chile.

Alexa Spar gets the word out by speaking at bell dedication ceremonies, meeting with transplant recipients, donors, and medical staff, and working with Donate Life, an organization dedicated to encouraging organ donation. She intends to become a kidney donor herself. Spar has also spoken at temples, town halls, Girl Scout events, the Rivertowns Rotary Club, and at Dell Seton and Ascension.

"I am very grateful to have been able to meet so many amazing people," she affirmed. "The best part is meeting those who are affected by the arduous process of donating or receiving an organ, such as the doctors, recipients, and even altruistic donors."

Isabella Spar concurred: "One of the most amazing things about Project Bell is the people my sister and I have had the opportunity to meet and make connections with and share stories with."

"I was fortunate enough to have been recognized by the Greenburgh Town Council in 2017 for the creation of Project Bell," she continued. "I was so excited to have received that recognition then and am even more happy and proud for my sister to have received that recognition this year for all of her hard work in expanding the project. I am always so proud of her."

Alexa Spar added that Project Bell is looking for teens who want to help raise awareness of the project and organ transplants. According to Isabella Spar, "We're hoping one day we will be able to donate to any center around the world that wants a bell."

For more information about Project Bell or to donate to the project, visit projectbell.org.