

Kids helping kids

Ohio brothers show WTC kids they care

By Linda Barr

Two little boys with great big hearts arrived in New York this week to extend the hand of friendship and support to the children of 13th Precinct and Emergency Service Unit Truck 1 (ESU) personnel killed in the World Trade Center tragedy.

Brothers Kyle and Cody Brieschke flew from the town of Sylvania, Ohio, with their mother, Bonnie, to announce the launch of their project, Kids Helping Kids.

The project is an extension of the Gramercy Park initiative, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, which has seen the local residents — led by Gramercy Block Association president, Arlene Harrison — operate an unprecedented support operation for the men and women of the local emergency services.

Now Kyle, 12, and Cody, 11, along with their brother, Blake, 17, plan to organize a schools project in support of little Patricia Mary Smith, two, Katie McDonnell, eight, and her brother Thomas, three.

Patricia Mary is the daughter of 13th Precinct PO Moira Smith, who was killed in the Twin Towers collapse along with her partner, PO Bobby Fazio, a bachelor. Katie and Thomas' dad, Brian, a member of the 21st Street ESU, also lost his life in the terror attacks.

The Brieschke brothers first learned about the local children through their aunt, Gramercy resident, Jennifer Lerch, who was the spark that led to a cross-country convoy of supplies being trucked from Sylvania to Gramercy Park to help in the relief effort at the height of the crisis.

When Jennifer had called her sister, Bonnie, at the bakery she runs in Sylvania to tell her about the need for supplies, it led to a massive outpouring of support from the residents of the Ohio town.

In fact, so many Sylvanians poured into the bakery to donate everything from toothbrushes to steel-toed boots to the New York heroes, it led to gridlock in the tiny town.

But while the Brieschke brothers played their role in that effort, they still wanted to do more.

"We came home from school that day [Septem-



SOME-ONE TO WATCH OVER — James Smith and his daughter Patricia Mary, and Maggie McDonnell with her children, Katie and Thomas.



SHARING THE CARE — Kyle and Cody visit the 13th Precinct with mom, Bonnie (back left) Aunt Jennifer (back right) and Arlene Harrison.

ber 11] and we were all worried about Aunt Jennifer," explained Cody. "We helped people unload donations to send to New York, but we still felt we wanted to do something just from the kids."

With a little help from their mother, aunt and their newly-adopted auntie, Arlene, the boys came up with an idea to sell New York police and fire department baseball

caps in Sylvania, which they have been given at cost-price by East 21st Street suppliers, Junior's.

"We also plan to contact the student councils at all of the 14 schools in our area to see if we can have a competition to see who can raise the most money for the kids in New York," added Kyle.

"Whichever student council raises the most money — they can have

bake sales, skating parties, car washes, whatever they want to do — will be invited to come to New York to present the check personally."

However, as Harrison explained, the effort is more from the heart than the wallet.

"It doesn't matter how much money they raise, it matters that they want to make a difference," said

the block association president. "What they are doing is letting these local children know that there are kids across the country who care about what they're going through."

Harrison explained how, in the weeks following the tragedy, thousands of letters arrived at the local police and fire houses from children all over the country. Meanwhile, Gramercy youngsters became frequent visitors to the 13th Precinct, dropping off colorful posters of support, baked goods and candy.

"It was very comforting for the officers to see these kids," she said, "They weren't seeing their own kids for days at a time and this was a way of distracting them from their own grief."

Harrison explained how the adults and young children also found the relief effort therapeutic to their own healing process. Indeed Harrison freely admits that he own worry about her son, Nicholas — a Special Forces, 82nd Airborne Rangers, Commanding Officer currently on "classified" assignment — have been tempered by her involvement in the effort.

However, she added, "We've since come to realize that many of the older children were just as traumatized by the events of September 11, but had no coping mechanism. They were asking themselves what kind of world we, as adults, were leaving them, as they read in the newspapers and watched on TV

some of the atrocities going on in the world. It was heartbreaking to realize that there were kids all over the country feeling the pain of New York, its heroes and their children."

When the Brieschke brothers came up with their plan to help the local children who have suffered so much, Harrison said she knew immediately it was an ideal way to create a "healing mechanism" for all children.

"The people of Sylvania turned out to be the backbone of our Gramercy Park relief effort thanks to the supplies they sent. Now Kyle and Cody's project is a way for the older children to continue this caring and to feel they have some control in this world, that they can really do something.

"They are starting at a very local level and realizing that, if everyone takes care of the person right in front of them, it can really make a difference."

While Cody, Kyle and Blake get busy in Ohio, Harrison's next plan is to get Gramercy teens involved in what she hopes will become a nationwide effort.

"Already I've had calls from our kids who want to play a part and, just these kids making a caring connection from such a tragedy is a very, very special thing," she added.

"For good to truly prevail over evil, we must all do our part to continue to care about each other."

To find out more about Kids Helping Kids, call Arlene Harrison on 260-3875.