

## GAME CHANGER

## General Mills' huge donation boosts local twins' expanding cereal collection for Boca Helping Hands

By: Dale King Contributing Writer

When Eric Justin first brought his twin sons to join him as a volunteer at Boca Helping Hands three years ago, he probably didn't know how their participation would grow into a cereal collection program that now involves seven local elementary schools – and shows no sign of stopping.

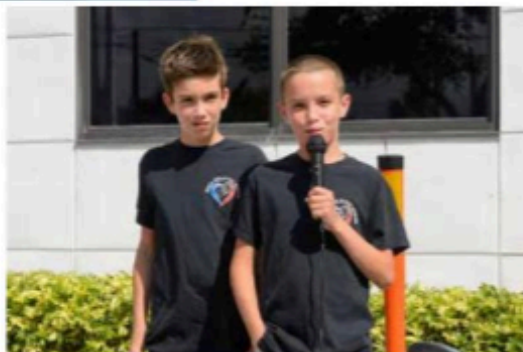
Since they first began stuffing "Pantry Bags" for needy families, Jett and Luke Justin, now 11-year-old fifth graders at Calusa Elementary, became aware of how important cereal is for a balanced, nutritious diet – and how necessary it is that all families – particularly those whose kitchen cabinets are not always filled with sufficient edibles – receive boxes of cereal in their take-home bags.

Soon after starting their volunteer work, the boys launched a cereal collection drive at their own school and gathered up about 500 boxes.

This year, the boys recruited a half-dozen other educational sites to join in the campaign – Addison Mizner, Boca Elementary, Del Prado Elementary, Sandpiper Shores, Sunrise Park Elementary and Verde Elementary.

The effort has earned a name -- the Boca Raton Cereal Drive Alliance -- and the class at each school that collects the most boxes of the breakfast specialty wins a cereal party. Jett and Luke have spoken at some of these schools about how they came up with the idea for the effort and why it's needed.

As a result of their work this year, the Justin brothers were able to deliver 2,700



Jett, left, and Luke Justin address the crowd after General Mills delivered 2,500 boxes of cereal to Boca Helping Hands on March 12. Submitted photo.



Luke, center left, and Jett Justin with their parents and Mike Siemienas, right, brand public relations manager for General Mills. Submitted photo.

boxes of the breakfast staple to BHH.

While the Justin twins aren't looking for notoriety, they got it March 12 when General Mills delivered a "surprise" to the headquarters of the nutrition for the needy program at 1500 1<sup>st</sup> Court in Boca.

As a crowd of students, school officials and Boca Helping Hands staff began to form outside the building, two BHH refrigerated trucks moved aside, unveiling big cardboard boxes containing 2,500 boxes of General Mills cereals from the General Mills plant in Minnesota. The crowd applauded the big reveal.

Among those in the crowd were educators who've been supporting the boy's efforts -- Calusa Elementary principal Dianne Rivelli-Schreiber, and student government teachers, Melanie Siegel and Dana Griffith.

Also on hand was Mike Siemienas, brand public relations manager for General Mills. He noted that the Justin brothers had been writing letters to General Mills about their cereal drive for three years. "The third time was the charm," he

said. "The twins' compelling letter caught the attention of the General Mills cereal team." And the giant cereal producer came up with a major delivery of their product.

The boys were stunned when the big containers of cereal became visible. "We were amazed and completely shocked. We are really honored that General Mills helped us," Jett said.

"I was shocked when the truck pulled out and the cereal was there," added Luke. "We doubled the amount of cereal within seconds of the truck pulling out. It was amazing."

Greg Hazle, executive director of Boca Helping Hands, said he's impressed with the boys and their commitment to helping the community and organizing the cereal drive.

"It's a remarkable demonstration of the power of conviction," he said. "These boys have obviously learned that giving is better than receiving -- and that this is a message worth sharing with their peers."

Hazle noted that cereal is always in short supply at the pantry and that this drive is very beneficial to the community. "There are as many as 20,000 people that benefit from our pantry bag program. Anything that has to do with cereal anytime of the year is good."

As to the future, the twins responded with the obvious: "We move to middle schools and other elementary schools next year."

Hazle said he's confident that Luke and Jett can accomplish whatever they put their minds to. "I am still blown away by their commitment, not just to volunteering, but doing something to meet the needs of people. They're my heroes."

Boca Helping Hands is a community-based, non-profit that feeds those in need, provides job training and job mentoring, distributes medical and dental vouchers and provides limited financial assistance to Boca Raton residents in crisis. BHH can be reached at 561-417-0913 or [bocahelpinghands.org](http://bocahelpinghands.org). ■