Today Is Your Birthday!
GIVING RATHER THAN GETTING ON YOUR SPECIAL DAY

Imagine it’s your birthday and instead of bringing you gifts to unwrap, your guests are handing you bags of food. It’s a new concept for birthday parties that helps feed the hungry.

Hunger is a problem in the United States that currently affects one in six Americans, according to the nonprofit organization, Feeding America. Kate Darcy Hohenthal has found a new way to try and make the hungry stomachs of America stop growling.

Hohenthal founded The Birthday Club, which encourages families to provide nonperishable foods to food pantries in 15 different states so far. The idea came to her when she started taking her daughter to birthday parties nearly every week in preschool and realized that the cost of buying all the gifts was adding up. Not only that, but all the stuff she was accumulating when it was her children’s birthdays was out of control. She decided to change the way birthdays were celebrated in her family.

Hohenthal received her MBA in 1994 from the University and her doctorate in educational leadership in 2010. She incorporates ideas from her doctoral thesis about learning and how to make it sustainable into her birthday club idea.

“My concept is that doing service with learning makes it more sustainable,” explains Hohenthal.

There is no actual club to join says Hohenthal. In 2009 she launched a website, www.thebirthdayclub.net, in which she explains how the birthday parties work, suggests party themes, provides a list of food shelters to which people can donate, and encourages people to share stories and submit photographs from past parties. When children have a party for food, they are given the opportunity to actually go to the shelter and place the food on the shelves. “It’s a wonderful feeling of fulfillment for the children. They get to see how they are helping others,” says Hohenthal.

Hohenthal credits the University of Hartford with giving her support and providing her with opportunities to showcase her work on The Birthday Club. During the men’s and women’s basketball America East Championships that were held at the University in March, Hohenthal was able to set up a booth and tell people attending the games about her ideas.

Passionate about fighting hunger, Hohenthal is doing more than her fair share to feed hungry people in her community. However, she credits professors in the Barney School of Business with helping her make The Birthday Club what it is today. “The professors really helped me and became not only my mentors but my support,” says Hohenthal.

Throughout all her research and time put into The Birthday Club, one mentor who continues to support Hohenthal is Associate Professor Karen Case. “The Birthday Club is a testament to her work in our educational leadership program. She has brought attention to the hunger problem on a local and national level,” says Case.

With the continued success of The Birthday Club, Hohenthal hopes that more and more people across the country will have food parties and that, one day, all Americans will have enough to eat every day and night. “A lot of people donate food for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but the interesting thing about birthdays is that they happen year round, so you can give year round,” says Hohenthal.