

## Delaware Valley Girls Soccer Team Aids Manville Players With Wawa Contest Prize

When the Delaware Valley girls soccer team traveled to Manville for a Skyland Conference game on Sept. 18, they couldn't help but notice the scenes of destruction as their bus neared the school. That's because Manville suffered catastrophic flood damage just over two weeks earlier, when the heavy rains from the remnants of Hurricane Ida drastically affected the Somerset County town.

It was an eye-opening experience for the Delaware Valley players and their coach, Dave Kirschenmann. And it was made even more pronounced after arriving at the field, when Manville coach Erin Shannon told Kirschenmann that four of her players were displaced from their homes because of the horrendous damage from the storm.

"They were still cleaning up," Kirschenmann said. "There were piles and piles of trash around and their coach told me that was after the backhoes and dump trucks had come through and taken most of the stuff out."

Delaware Valley won the game, 4-0, but the team couldn't shake the hardship that Manville was facing. That's when they got a rather brilliant idea.

The day before, Kirschenmann and all of the coaches at Delaware Valley received an email from Bill Daniz, the school athletic director. It was to notify all that Wawa, a new NJSIAA sponsor, was conducting a contest, the Wawa/NJSIAA TikTok School Spirit Challenge. Students had to submit a video of they, their team or both on a Wawa run. The winning submitting student would receive a \$500 Wawa gift card, and their team a \$2,000 cash prize.

The players started talking on the bus ride back home to Alexandria Township, and they decided to enter a video into the contest. The catch was that if they won, they'd donate their award to the families of the displaced Manville players. So, led by senior Grace Johnson, they devised their video plan. The team bus then stopped at the Wawa in Flemington. They did some shopping and shot their video in the parking lot.

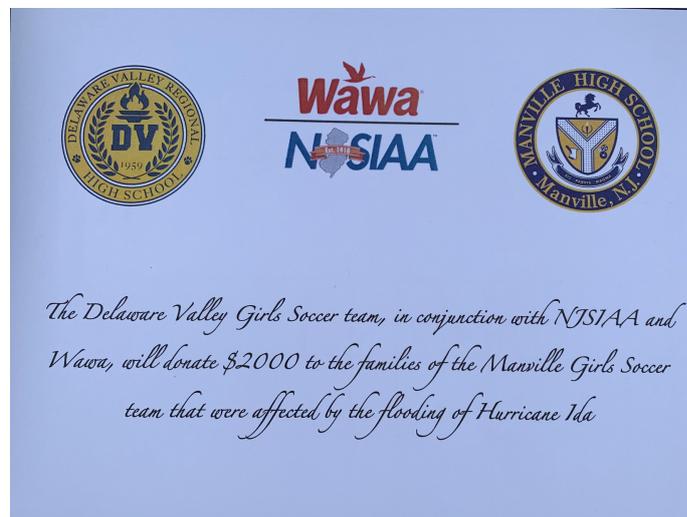
"It was really the whole team that made it happen," Johnson said. "It was heartbreaking to see the trash and stuff on the roads that we were driving past on the way to the game. When the thought of the video came up after, we didn't have to think twice about it. We planned our dance on the way to Wawa and then we did it minute by minute when we got there, and it turned out really cool. It felt really good to be able to do that for them."

Around two weeks later, Johnson received a message on her phone from Wawa, notifying her that she and her team were the contest winners.

"It was so fun much to make it," she said. "And then when we found out that we won, we were all freaking out."

Part 2 of the story came on Monday, Oct. 18, which happened to also be the first day of the inaugural NJSIAA Sportsmanship Week, sponsored by JAG-One Physical Therapy.

On that day, Delaware Valley played host to Manville in their second matchup of the season. The home team won the game, but any Manville disappointment from the loss ended about a minute afterward, when Kirschenmann and his players approached the visitor's bench with the news of the contest prize and corresponding donation. Manville coach Shannon and the school administration knew that it was coming, but for the players, it was a complete and very pleasant surprise.



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"It's remarkable that they would do that," Shannon said. "It's been a really tough season with everything going on. In Manville, we have 175 displaced families, with four on our team still not in a home. To have another team come together and think of ours, with the kindness and thoughtfulness they showed, it's very humbling to have a team go above and beyond like that."

"I'm very grateful," Manville captain Victoria Sobkowicz said. "It made my heart happy that they would do that for our team. I'm very close to one of the girls and she was staying in a hotel for a while, so I know this will help her. I've seen pictures from another teammate and her house was completely submerged. It's so great they were able to donate to them."

"It was very surprising," added Manville player Siobhan Wesolowski. "It has been hard seeing my teammates in that state. It's really helpful and it definitely makes me feel a lot better after seeing my teammates light up like that. I'm glad they are getting help that they need and deserve. We really appreciate it."

For Delaware Valley, it was a gesture of sportsmanship which showcased the team's unity and character.

"It's a tight-knit group," Kirschenmann said. "They hang out a lot, and do a lot together and they saw the opportunity. We thought that if we could help, we would be happy to do so. It seemed like the right thing to do."

As far as NJSIAA Executive Director Colleen Maguire is concerned, there couldn't have been a better way to begin the first NJSIAA Sportsmanship Week, which will also take place during the winter and spring seasons.

"As a parent who is very aware of the role that TikTok plays in the lives of today's teenagers, I applaud Wawa for engaging our student-athletes and coaches off the field in a fun-filled promotion," she said. "And I commend the players on the Delaware Valley girls soccer team for their empathy and compassion demonstrated in this story – every small gesture makes a difference and the entire Delaware Valley community should be proud of their display of sportsmanship. This is education-based athletics at its best – thank you girls!"

