

# DAILY TIMES

## Haverford Township Day celebrates compassionate community

- [Pete Bannan](#)
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PETE BANNAN - DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA

Rachel McGonigle with her kids Aislin and Sam. McGonigle will be the grand marshal of the Haverford Township parade, honored for her work in promoting a caring community. She started her organization after the community opened its heart to her family when her kids were seriously ill.

**Haverford** —The 24th Haverford Township Day takes place Oct. 6, a day-long celebration of community pride. The theme of the day is a Compassionate Community, and in that vein the grand marshal will be Rachel McGonigle, a township resident who turned her anguish into helping fellow residents. McGonigle has created the Facebook page “Compassion United Havertown,” which assists residents in need with extra short-term aid.

Rachel grew up in Ardmore, graduated from Archbishop Carroll in 1993 and then went to Villanova to become a nurse. She works as a RN at Recovery Center of Devon. She has four children, Sam, 14, Maire, 11, Josh, 10, and Aislin, 7.

In December of 2016 McGonigles' son Sam, then 12, was diagnosed with Stage 3A Hodgkins Lymphoma. As the family grappled with the disease their daughter Aislin,5, was also found to have Stage 2A of the disease. Dealing with the crisis of two serious ill children, the family struggled to maintain a sense of normalcy while spending much of the time at Children's Hospital.

"The night before Easter I realized I forgot about Easter baskets," Rachel McGonigle recalled. "I went on the Havertown Community Network Facebook page and asked if anyone could help make baskets for my four children. Three hundred people responded, it was incredible. We were blown away that this many people would reach out to help us. I was moved to tears by the outpouring of generosity from many who were total strangers.

McGonigle said that Sam and Aislin are both now doing fantastic. From the experience McGonigle harnessed the power of social media and created her own Facebook page, "[Compassion United Havertown](#)," which now has more than 1,600 members.

"I had an idea, what if we created a place for other families. We pick a family in Havertown and what the family needs, we post the needs to the page," McGonigle said. "We have a great team that gets it done."

The page states they are neighbors helping neighbors who can benefit from a helping hand in Havertown and surrounding communities. It is focused on helping others in the community experiencing temporary hardships. They don't assist with financial, medical support or long-term needs. McGonigle said they pick a different family about once a month.

“One was a 40-year-old man who had suffered a heart attack and needed help taking care of his family; another was a single mom having trouble making ends meet,” McGonigle said.

In July the group assisted Amanda, a Havertown resident who became a full-time mother to her 4-year-old grandson. Amanda works full-time but is still not making ends meet with the added needs of her grandson. Using a group sign-up page volunteers collected clothing, a bicycle, volunteer food delivery, gift cards as well as a plumbing repair.

“The Holy Spirit filled me when I got the idea to do a page to help other local families in need,” Rachel explained. “Because I allowed people into my trials and darkness, I was able to have my load lightened by others and create a place where neighbors can help neighbors in the Havertown community. It is difficult to reach out and ask for help, but I find it more comforting to accept help from strangers than to keep relying on friends and family for everything. Haverford Assistant Township manager Tim Denny said anyone can nominate others in the community who have demonstrated compassion.

They will be recognized for their contribution at noon on the Brookline stage. Contact [Recinfo@havtwp.org](mailto:Recinfo@havtwp.org) or the Recreation Department for the nomination.

The Havertown Day parade kicks off at 10:30 a.m., beginning at Manoa Shopping Center headed east on Eagle Road to Darby Road. It ends at the Skatium. In addition to the parade other events centered along Darby road in Brookline include: a 5K run for Merry Place; music throughout the day on three stages; free skating at the Skatium; rides and bounces; a craft show; and plenty of food.