Staten Island youngsters collect pennies for preemies

Published: Thursday, July 08, 2010, 9:27 AM    Updated: Thursday, July 08, 2010, 4:55 PM

Diane Lore

Photo Courtesy of RUMC
The Young Helpers of PS 19 pose with Scooter, the Staten Island Yankees mascot, and nursing staff of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Richmond University Medical Center, West Brighton. (Pictured on the cover are, from the left, Alberto Ballestro; students Steven Chan and Shikioni Sykes; Anthony Barone, M.D.; Racquel Anderson and Rosemarie Stazzone, both registered nurses, and Kathleen.)

WEST BRIGHTON
STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. - A group of fourth- and fifth-graders at PS 19, officially known as the Young Helpers, have helped an even younger population.

The children selected the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC) to receive the proceeds of their Penny Harvest campaign this past school year.

Each year, many city public schools participate in the campaign. Students are asked to collect pennies for about one month in the fall. In the spring, after the pennies are totaled, students are empowered to decide which organizations will receive the money they collected.
In April, PS 19 students met with Racquel Anderson, a registered nurse and nurse-manager of the NICU at RUMC, who explained how the hospital helps premature and sick infants. The unit boasts an extremely low mortality rate and is rated one of the best in the city.

“We are just so touched and so grateful that these special kids thought to help our babies,” Mrs. Anderson said.

“These students are interested in making positive changes in their school and community,” said teacher Jeanne Raleigh, moderator of the Young Helpers.

Of the 645 votes cast at the school, 450 students voted in favor of giving the largest donation to the hospital.

The students visited the unit on June 25 to present their donation — a check for $332 — to help the tiny patients — all babies born prematurely.

Other organizations that benefited from PS 19’s Penny Harvest were Project Homefront, the Seamen’s Society for Children and Families and the Richmond Senior Services food pantry.

“This is an incredible gesture from young Staten Islanders,” said Rosemarie Stazzone, senior vice-president of nursing and clinical affairs and chief nursing officer at RUMC. “Perhaps among this group are future doctors and nurses.”

Mary Sheridan who administers the internship program at PS 19, explained that the Young Helpers participate in the philanthropy group all year.

“They work to make the community better, and ultimately, it helps them become better citizens and know everyone has a special talent.”

SOURCE: