


Making a Difference

Meet some heroes from the Pepsi Refresh Project

Good Neighbors, Great Causes

BY SHARON MALE

 A spark (of inspiration), a click (of a mouse to vote), a check (to ensure an idea is worthy). Those were the only steps needed to be a winner with the Pepsi Refresh Project, which this year asked Americans to vote online for the best ways to benefit their communities. Each month the people behind the proposals that earned the most votes were awarded grants (up to \$250,000) and given help executing them. Here are a few of the 384 winning ideas.



"We won't push patients beyond their comfort zones," says dentist Casie Burk Jones (center)

DENTAL CARE FOR DISABLED KIDS

Group Noll Dental Clinic, Springfield, Ill.
Award \$50,000

The prospect of a visit to the dentist can unsettle anyone. But for young people with autism and other developmental disabilities, it can be traumatic—to the point that many refuse to be treated or are forced to have routine procedures performed under costly, and risky, general anesthesia. "It may take several visits before they feel comfortable even opening their mouths," says Joshua Renken, a dentist in Springfield, Ill. And the fact that some of these patients can't voice what's bothering them

can make the situation even more complicated.

Last spring, Renken, 34, opened the nonprofit Noll Dental Clinic with the goal of aiding this underserved group, and doing so with kindness and patience. Insurance is accepted, but those without coverage are charged according to what they can afford. Casie Burk Jones, the dentist who runs the clinic, uses puppets, toys, and other props to explain the procedures and put patients at ease.

"We want to fulfill the dreams of every veteran," says co-founder Kevin Haynes

She and her hygienist, Kim Trapani, also take extensive notes on their likes and dislikes. "Maybe they don't like mint," Burk Jones says. "So we'll use a different kind of toothpaste. It can be as simple as that."

The first time Jack

Valentine, 19, visited the clinic, he barely made it through the door. Slowly he relaxed, and by his sixth visit, though he wouldn't sit in the dentist's chair, he pulled a chair up to the hygienist's tray and let her work on his teeth for

50 minutes. For most of us, a trip to the dentist means nothing more than a good cleaning. But for these patients and their families, it's much more. "It was amazing," says Jack's grateful mom, Sandy. "This is a big deal for him—a huge step."



A BIG THANK-YOU TO AILING VETS

Group Warrior's Wish Foundation, Machias, N.Y.
Award \$50,000

A few years ago, when a veteran in western New York suffering from cancer needed a bathroom built on the first floor of his home

because he couldn't climb stairs, the local American Legion post came to his aid and constructed one. But two of its members, Kevin Haynes and David Wright, wanted to do more, so they and a committed group of volunteers pitched in on