

Mother's Day gift baskets brim with love

Annual project sponsored by Lauren Rose Albert Foundation

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WASHINGTON TWP.

Cherry Hill resident Susan Rose meticulously placed pink shampoo next to burgundy nail polish in a plastic basket decorated with fuchsia and white tissue paper.

She checked to make sure everything a woman might need for an at-home makeover was perfectly presented as part of a project called Mothers Matter.

When she finished, she wrapped the basket and contents in gauzy white tulle, and attached a tag that said "Lauren Rose Albert Foundation," the nonprofit she founded in 2000 in memory of her eldest daughter.

Albert died in a car accident while vacationing in Morocco with her husband in 1999, and her mother wanted

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to do something in her honor. Thus the creation of the foundation and the Mother's Day basket project.

"She was the mother of three, and we wanted to do something to honor mothers," Rose said.

Rose has always been actively involved with her community as a volunteer.

The women Rose calls "core volunteers" start planning the fundraiser in July. In the fall, they get schools, businesses and community groups to collect products in large tubs distributed by the organization.

In March, volunteers col-

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lect the tubs and start to organize the beauty products and purchase wrapping materials and baskets.

Then comes crunch time. Nearly 100 volunteers from dozens of different organizations and towns work to fill and wrap

thousands of baskets during April and May.

The whole year's worth of planning culminates the week of Mother's Day, when volunteers distribute the baskets.

"It's really something amazing," said township resident Lisa Moriarty, who worked with Lauren Rose Albert before

she died.

The foundation raises money to give \$250 scholarships to working, single mothers to buy the books required for them to earn a college degree.

Mothers Matter this year packaged about 2,000 baskets and distributed them to day cares, women's shelters and

safe houses in Camden, Salem, Cumberland, Gloucester and Burlington counties.

Rose, 68, and volunteers Lisa Moriarty of Washington Township and JoAnn McPoyle of the Wedgewood Women's Club remember stories of women who have cried as they handed them the baskets.

"We wanted to make a difference," Rose said. "We wanted to find something that mothers really needed, that we could provide."

The foundation has grown, mostly by word of mouth and from the thousands of dollars donated and raised by dozens of sponsors.

"I had no idea when we started that it was going to be like this," Rose said. "Mothers matter. It's our mantra. We work so hard for the baskets to be beautiful and perfect, and we just hope that it helps."

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Susan Rose, founder of the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation, kisses Imere Bryant at the Bernice Miller Day Care Center, where the group distributed Mother's Day gift baskets on Friday.