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SOUL FOOD

Kristen with boxes of meal kits couples packed up before a dinner bash.



EVERYDAY HERO

Date-Night Do-Gooding

This Orlando mom found a genius way to marry couples bonding with charity

SEEING A SIMPLE ACT OF CHARITY BY HER CHILDREN inspired mom Kristen Manieri to think up an easy new way for adults to give back. "I was at my daughter's school for their volunteer day," says Kristen. The kids were working in teams and injecting friendly competition into their task of creating meal kits for needy families before going off to play. A lightbulb went on. "I thought, *Why can't adults do the same thing?*" says Kristen, 40, who hatched the idea for Do Good Date Night, a social—and socially conscious—nonprofit that throws events in which couples and friends get together to pack meal kits, hygiene packs for the homeless and more before digging in to a catered light buffet with beer and wine.

Kristen had already founded the popular website Orlando Date Night Guide, on which she highlighted hot spots for fun evenings. She and her husband, Marc, the parents of two girls, regularly donated to charity, but like many others, they never →



seemed to find time to volunteer in person. To get Do Good Date Night off the ground, she reached out to Feeding Children Everywhere, a national organization based in Longwood, FL. "They loved the idea," says Kristen. The first joint effort in September 2015 quickly sold out (tickets are generally \$20 to \$25 per person). There, the attendees packed 9,500 meals and raised enough money through a raffle to fund 12,000 more. Best of all, many of that night's diners still volunteer with Feeding Children Everywhere. Since that first dinner, more than 700 people have stepped up for a



PARTIES WITH A PURPOSE

Left, volunteers Fernanda and Zach Horvath put together kits for Feeding Children Everywhere. Above, packing up sweet potatoes for Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida.

night of service and socializing. "It's easy to write a check," says Kristen. "But rolling up your sleeves gives you an opportunity to truly make a difference."

HOW SHE DOES IT

Kristen partners with charities like Second Harvest, Goodwill and Habitat for Humanity that offer simple tasks and results with an impact. "They provide the service opportunity," she says. She adds the fun factor: When a Do Good

Date Night is held at a charity's facility, she organizes entertainment like trivia contests and live music. In other cases, Do Good Date Night is more of a pop-up party—for example, a winery hosted an event at which couples created 2,100 hygiene kits with things like soap and shampoo for Clean the World and then enjoyed a wine-blending competition. Kristen taps sponsors and donors to keep events affordable and provide raffle prizes.

Want to try something similar in your area? Kristen's top tips:

START SMALL You don't have to throw a big event with partners—you could organize a group to pick up garbage at a local park and then grab burgers and beer afterward.

GRADUALLY GROW Reach out to local organizations, such as food banks, that already have a major need for volunteers and see if they'll partner with you.

DO IT YOURSELF Nonprofits tend to be financially stretched, so don't rely on them to handle tasks like catering and marketing. For more inspiration, visit dogooddatenight.com. —Lisa Beach

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