

California Little Leaguer Organizes Donation of School Supplies, Teaches Community Lesson in Compassion

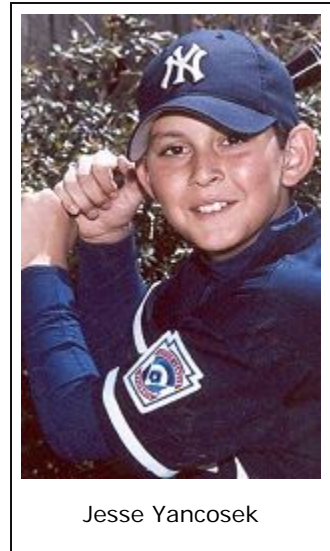
WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (April 4, 2005) – Arroyo Grande, Calif., and Beslan, Russia are at opposite corners of the world, yet 11-year-old Jesse Yancosek, and the children of Beslan have much in common.

In November 2004, Jesse, a student at Branch Elementary School in Arroyo Grande, and a player in the Arroyo Grande Valley Little League, was watching a television newscast describing a terrorist attack on a school in Beslan. Hundreds perished, including many children, as a hostage situation ended with a bomb detonating in the school's gymnasium.

"It was very sad to see how the children were attacked," Jesse said. "It reminded me of the events that took place in New York on Sept. 11."

At the time, the sixth-grader was brainstorming ideas for a school-required community service project. After seeing the devastating footage, Jesse knew his project would be to somehow help those children.

"Jesse could relate to the children, because they were about the same age," Barry Yancosek, Jesse's father, said. "The donation drive was specifically dedicated to the hundreds of devastated children attacked in Beslan."



"School supplies were sent because it was school supplies that were lost in the attack," Jesse said. "The school supplies could be used to help the children and teachers start a new beginning in the classroom."

When presented with the idea, Mr. Yancosek agreed to contact the American Red Cross to see what the possibilities were for donating, and shipping school supplies to Beslan. Red Cross officials directed him to the Commonwealth of Independent States Development Foundation (CISDF), a non-profit organization based in New Jersey that assists in rebuilding the Russian economy.

Space in a shipping container was secured by the CISDF, and the United Parcel Service (UPS) provided \$750 to cover the shipping costs from Arroyo Grande to Russia.

Even though the tough part seemed easy, Jesse still had to gather the donated supplies.

"We are all just kids going to school," Jesse said. "Once we got the help from families at my school, I realized how important my project was to other people."

Jesse spent the next four weeks informing his classmates, teachers, and the Arroyo Valley community about his international relief drive. Through fliers and word of mouth, Jesse collected more than 100 pounds of supplies that are presently in Moscow awaiting distribution to Beslan in April.

"Jesse's empathy for the children of Beslan was evident by his desire to want to head up this drive," Mr. Yancosek said. "His principal, teacher, and the families of Branch Elementary are proud of his efforts and supported his cause 100 percent."

Several politicians, including a representative from the office of California Congressman Bill Thomas, heard of Jesse's donation drive, and honored him with a visit to the school.

Among the awards Jesse received were a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition, presented by Congressman Thomas, a Certificate of District Recognition presented by District Four Supervisor Katcho Adchadjian, and a Certificate of Recognition from the California Assembly, presented by District Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee.

"Following the awards presentation, Jesse's demeanor was much like his demeanor had been described by his all-star coach, Nick Pino," Mr. Yancosek said. "He was 'confident and poised,' but he remained humble."

"This project was like when I pitched two complete games in minor all-stars," Jesse said. "What made those games, and this project, special was how focused our team was, and how well we came together as a team. I believe every position is important, and I will play wherever the coach needs me to play."

Jesse has been a player in the Arroyo Grande Valley Little League since the age of seven. Mr. Yancosek has managed, and is a member of the local league's board of directors. Jesse's mother, Nancy, is a team mom, and his sister Kaela plays Tee Ball in the local league. Arroyo Grande Valley Little League is part of District 50 in California.

Jesse Yancosek, an 11-year-old in the Arroyo Grande (Calif.) Valley Little League, organized a donation of more than 100 pounds of school supplies for children in Beslan, Russia. The project fulfilled a scholastic requirement, and was coordinated by Jesse after he saw a news report on a terrorist attack that destroyed a school in Beslan attended by children his own age. For his efforts, Jesse received several awards, including a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition.

