



Gift of giving

Azad started Basket Brigade in 1991. He and his students raise money to deliver full Thanksgiving dinners, enough to feed 15, to families in need across the North State. The program has fed over 60,000 people.

Grossman participated last year. Inspired after working with Azad on the Butte Strong Fund at the North Valley Community Foundation, she came with her family to assemble baskets.

"What a fun event," Grossman said. "Well-organized, positive high energy; it's people coming together for a common cause and contributing how they can."

Teenage students managed the operation, directing volunteers through the various lines and ensuring completion of tasks, with adult supervision.

"It was a really neat experience," she added, "welcoming."

Last year's Basket Brigade represented a milestone apart from the 30th anniversary. Azad opted to move beyond the Chico area to other cities in Butte County, with an eye toward neighboring counties.

He called Mary Sakuma,

superintendent of the Butte County Office of Education and a Basket Brigade participant, to find partners—school district officials in communities without such a program.

"I remember thinking this was a huge undertaking to go from supporting one community to try to provide baskets and children to families throughout our whole county," Sakuma said. "But I also know he's not a philosopher who stands on the sidelines and says, 'Somebody should do this.' He gets in and makes it happen—and that's exactly what he did."

Typically serving 200 families, the effort last year brought meals to 1,000.

"That outreach from Grandmaster Azad is very illustrative of who he is as a person and who he is as a community supporter," Sakuma added, "and really, in his own way, a community activist."

Gimme-Some-Sole stemmed from a 2016 meeting Azad had with local principals. After hearing that shoes and rain boots represented the most pressing need for low-income kids, he initiated a month-long collection that yielded 50 pairs donated on

Along with teaching martial arts, Azad instills the value of giving back by requiring community service projects from his youth students.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FARSHAD AZAD

Make a Difference Day that year. The Points of Light Foundation recognized the endeavor with a \$10,000 grant that he bestowed to the Torres Community Shelter.

"He has a really amazing ability to bring people together in such a beautiful way," Sakuma said, "and knows how to connect just the right people with the right people. He's a remarkable man—he's definitely had an impact on me."

On Grossman as well. She relayed a recent encounter with Azad at the Woofstock fundraiser for the Butte Humane Society, which he attended soon after shoulder surgery. Grossman, too, had a shoulder injury, not nearly as severe.

Arm in a sling, Azad showed her some Tai Chi moves to help relax her shoulder.

"His first thing is, 'How can I help you?'" Grossman said. "Whatever it is that you're doing, he gives of himself, just very purely."

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