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## East Bay Donation Station connects volunteers with those in need of help

By Diane Claytor



Leah Riggins, Founder of East Bay Donation Station social media site. Photo Diane Claytor

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Moraga's Leah Riggins is doing what she can to help Lamorindans "make a life."

Several months ago, Riggins, a stay-at-home mom with a 6-year-old son and 3-year old daughter, created the East Bay Donation Station (EBDS), a Facebook group dedicated to matching nonprofit organizations in need of items with people happily willing to donate to those groups. "I kept seeing people on local social media sites asking for donations for various groups," Riggins explained. "I started thinking that instead of people asking for things here and there and maybe feeling badly about always making these requests, why not start a group where individuals who have items to donate could hang out and watch for messages to come through saying we need certain things. Does anyone have them. It just seemed so easy to start such a group," Riggins continued. And so she did.

Riggins, originally from Texas, always thought of herself as philanthropic. Armed with a law degree from Boston College Law School, Riggins' goal was to pursue public interest law, "basically getting paid very little and

helping people that need help and knowing that you're making a difference in the world," she said. She wanted to help people solve their own problems by giving them the legal tools they'd need. Then she started having a family, moved to the Bay Area and decided to stay home for now. Creating the EBDS site was a natural. Riggins said, "I can do most of the work behind the scenes. It's easy to get on the phone or computer, send and respond to emails, make connections."

Riggins acknowledges that she is simply the conduit for charitable giving (think Match.com meets non-profits), connecting people and organizations. "Lamorinda is a very generous community," she said, and there are residents that work for nonprofit groups and others that volunteer. Over the years, Riggins has learned about the many needy groups throughout the area, knowing what they need and will (and won't) take and can now easily connect donors to them. Have some men's clothing to give away? She knows who will take them. Furniture, books, toys? Riggins can help find them a new home. And if she isn't sure, no doubt one of the other 260 EBDS members will have a suggestion.

The core membership of EBDS is from Lamorinda, but there are also members from Walnut Creek, Concord and other outlying areas. It's a closed group, meaning that Riggins must approve all requests to join. "The only criteria," she says, "are geographical location and an understanding that this is a 'give group' rather than a group for scoring freebies."

Over the holidays, Riggins connected with Bobbie Preston, who heads the local No One Left Behind chapter. This organization is dedicated to helping Afghan refugees settle into their new East Bay homes. When starting EBDS, Riggins said, "My image was not just answering someone's question about where to donate their pots and pans, but matching those pots and pans with someone that needed them." With Preston's help, Riggins posted a list of items these new residents needed so donors could determine what they had to offer and know where their donation was going. "Many people prefer knowing that their donation is going directly and quickly to someone specific," Riggins noted.

Complementing Riggins' efforts is another local philanthropic mom - and executive director of Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation - Maya Smith, who is developing a written list of local nonprofits and their ongoing needs. "I believe we can each leverage some combination of our time, treasure and talent to alleviate suffering and encourage the flourishing of others," Smith says, asking EBDS members to add organization names and needs to the list. "I started thinking about how I could make a difference in my own community and get my family, as well as others, involved," Smith says, and that's the genesis of this list. "We are surrounded by a lot of need and I thought this could be an organic, community-driven way to become more aware of those needs."

In the short time she has been administering the EBDS site, Riggins has been quite impressed with the generosity of the Lamorinda community. "We had a need for diapers and actually had members go out to

purchase boxes of them. These weren't extras they had lying around but new boxes purchased specifically to fill this need," Riggins exclaimed. "They spent \$30-40. And then they got their neighbors to buy diapers and asked their friends to do the same. They did this for people they don't know and will never meet," she continued. "It's incredibly heartwarming."

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