

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Used gear helps kids in other countries play ball

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Within a week of reading a 2007 *Beacon* article about Roberto's Kids, Bernie Kelleher was running the international charitable organization's local efforts.

Now, the Great Neck man is looking for another service-minded baseball fan to take over because he's being transferred to Belgium by Lockheed Martin.

The 46-year-old was drawn to Roberto's Kids, a nonprofit organization that collects used baseball equipment from around the United States and Canada and sends it to baseball-crazy areas in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

The initiative was spearheaded by New Yorker Stephen Pindar and the children of Roberto Clemente.

Clemente, who was born in Puerto Rico and played for the Pittsburgh Pirates, died while en route to delivering earthquake relief supplies to Nicaragua in 1972. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame just three months after his death when baseball writers waived the customary five-year waiting period.

Kelleher said the program has been one of his life's most rewarding experiences. The reason: instilling an ethic of community service in his children.



The Kelleher family has handled the collection and mailing of used baseball equipment to the Roberto's Kids charity since 2007, but will have to give up due to a move overseas. Pictured are son Bern, 11, Bernie, 46, and Caroline, 14.

The Great Neck Pony Baseball league allows Kelleher to keep a drop-box for used gear next to the concession stand.

Every two weeks during the spring and fall seasons, Kelleher ships boxes to Roberto's Kids headquarters in Oneonta, N.Y. He estimated that he and his children sent 1,000 pounds of gear last year. The organization sends nearly 18 tons to the Caribbean annually.

"It's taught me to be kind to people and help those in need," 11-year-old Bern Kelleher said.

His 14-year-old sister, Caroline, added: "It's great, we're giving kids who don't have a chance to buy equipment to play baseball right."

Kelleher said Roberto's Kids is ripe for expansion. As far as he knows, the Great Neck drop box is the area's only site.

"We want someone who's around baseball and is willing to run by the box every couple of weeks," Kelleher said. "I'd love to see someone continue to keep kids involved in this."