



MATERNAL WINGS



Mrs. New Jersey United States 2010, Claire Pavlinec, Helps Expectant Mothers In Need Through Her Charity Maternal Wings

By Rebecca Kopp

“After my children were born and grew out of the infant stage, I didn’t know what to do with the unneeded baby items I had like the high chair, car seats, boppy, toys, clothing, etc,” said Claire Pavlinec, a stay at home mom and Founder/Director of Maternal Wings. “I wanted to give them to someone who needed them instead of selling them at a yard sale or throwing them out. I reached out to several local clinics to see if I could find a mom who could use the items. A case manager at one of the clinics eagerly accepted my items for one of her moms and asked if I could get anymore. I began collecting more items from moms I knew to give to her.” That was in early 2006 and now five years later, Pavlinec’s efforts to help needy mothers has grown into a full fledged charity called Maternal Wings.

“The need is huge,” said Pavlinec. “There is such a broad range of women and men in need. We have discovered that dads also struggle to provide for their babies as well as moms.” Joined by her close friend, Kerry Walsh, together they realized how serious the problem was and decided to organize their efforts by setting up a non profit 501c3 which they called Maternal Wings. “We have given to people from ages 15 to 42 including moms, grandmothers and dads. We see so many heartbreaking situations and to be able to help a little goes a long way. One young lady lost her father and then she and her mother lost their home. She was pregnant with no means of providing for her baby. Maternal Wings gave her the things she needed so she felt prepared as an expectant mother. On many occasions we receive a phone call from the hospital where a new mother is waiting to go home but is unable to leave the hospital because she does not have a car seat for her baby. I immediately jump in my car and head out to give her a car seat so that she can bring her baby home safely. Receiving a smile and a hug from these women and men are the best moments.”

Those in need are referred to Maternal Wings by various social service agencies. The program serves clients at several clinics throughout Ocean and Monmouth Counties as well as individual referrals from the community, pediatricians and the VNA. “We confirm that they are receiving services from an agency prior to giving out items,” said Pavlinec. “A phone call and proof of necessity is all it takes to be able to receive from us.” Pavlinec, Walsh and a host of volunteers spend many hours each week collecting, sorting and delivering baby products to families. “We do not accept toys, formula and items for children above 12 months old. We focus primarily on items that are needed for expectant mothers and infants such as strollers, pack & plays, car seats, infant tubs, high chairs, swings, clothing, boppy pillows, diaper bags, bouncers, carriers, bibs, blankets, bottles, etc.”

As a past Mrs. New Jersey America 2007 and the current Mrs. New Jersey United States 2010, Pavlinec has been able to showcase Maternal Wings by bringing it into the public eye. “My past and current pageant wins have given me the ability to shine the light on my charity by giving it much needed exposure,” said Pavlinec. “That exposure has helped Maternal Wings receive more donations and volunteers. I have been able to travel the state speaking to groups about Maternal Wings which ultimately helps more moms. Frankly, the title makes me more interesting to the press and that’s great. I had the privilege of doing a half hour show on News 12 about myself and Maternal Wings.”

The honor of being a two time “Mrs. New Jersey” has afforded Pavlinec many opportunities for herself and her charity. “I have modeled, attended red carpet events, been on radio and TV, and met extraordinary people like Donald Trump,

Jessie Jackson, Buzz Aldrin and Governor Christie,” said Pavlinec. “I am blessed and grateful for these extraordinary opportunities. They have not only given me a platform to promote Maternal Wings but have allowed me to truly appreciate the generosity of the people of New Jersey.”

Not one to rest on her laurels, Pavlinec and Maternal Wings have started a new website called maternalwingsfreecycle.com where families can post ads for maternity items they no longer need or browse for items that are available. “We’re very excited about our Free Cycle site,” said Pavlinec. “We’re beginning by helping moms in the tri-state area and eventually we want to do it nationally. With our new site, moms can connect directly to give and get items. It’s a great way to reach many more moms.”

Before Pavlinec had her children, she worked in geriatrics in many capacities. In her last position before becoming a full time mom, she was as a Director of Regional Sales and Marketing for an assisted living company where she oversaw 18 facilities in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. “I really enjoyed the work especially spending my time with residents and their families,” said Pavlinec. While starting her own family, she also went on to earn a Master’s Degree in Elementary Education with a Certification in Special Education so that she can work with children.

But of all her activities, being a mom is Pavlinec’s number one priority and fuels her passion. “Having children is what set me on this path,” said Pavlinec. “My two children, Alexis and Luc, remind me everyday of how blessed I am and how important it is to help other mother’s in need. I am trying to teach that spirit of giving back to my children as well.”

Helping others seems to run in the family. Pavlinec’s husband, Ken, is a Physical Therapist who owns “Hands On Physical Therapy with locations in Toms River and Lakewood. Claire, Ken, Alexis and Luc currently reside in Jackson.

“I thank God every day for the blessings in my life and I am humbled to be able to help others,” said Pavlinec. “I love sharing my story and my journey so that I can inspire and teach others how important it is to give what you can. I hope to write a book one day about how easy it is to give back and how by giving, you get back more than you can ever imagine. I live by a quote from Mother Teresa that says, “It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them.” I believe this is true . . . that we should put love into all that we do and our lives will be blessed with love in return. There is no greater gift.”

How You Can Help Maternal Wings:

Besides baby items, Maternal Wings accepts gift cards and monetary donations so that they can purchase particular items to create a back up inventory when the need is at its busiest. “We try not to put mothers on a waiting list,” said Pavlinec. “We also can always use volunteers to help collect and deliver items. We also need additional drop-off points for distribution. If you have a business and want to participate as a drop-off location, it would be greatly appreciated. Additionally, we can always use volunteers to donate their time to help promote our services and obtain donors.” Go to maternalwings.com to see a list of needed items. You can reach Maternal Wings at 732-674-4975 or visit their websites at: www.maternalwings.com and www.maternalwingsfreecycle.com. ■