

Bringing His Love of the Game to Children in Need



When Andreas Papakostas, C93, heard about a village in Africa where the children enjoy soccer so much they play on rocky ground without proper clothes or shoes, he didn't think twice about what he needed to do.

The next day, he started a collection drive to send as many shoes and other soccer-related apparel to the children of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Papakostas, who was once a professional soccer player in Greece and now runs Korwitts Chiropractic Center in Downers Grove, was inspired by one of his patients, who last year was busy collecting books to bring back to the children of his home village.

"We collected many books and the stories we heard of the excitement of the teachers and parents from the village was inspiring," Papakostas said. "Then, when my patient was describing how the kids enjoy playing soccer even though they do not have shoes or proper clothes and equipment, I said I would help get the word out to collect as many soccer-related items as possible to ship back to the village."

Papakostas announced the donation drive through the Olympic Soccer Academy in Plainfield, a training school he started and operates for young players, to help spread the word and increase donations. He is collecting old or new soccer shoes, shin guards, socks, shorts, jerseys, shirts, goalie gloves and balls until the end of July, when they will be shipped to the needy children.

"To know that a village of kids will be able to wear shoes, socks, have team uniforms and new soccer balls, sends a mental picture to me of their happiness and gratitude," Papakostas said. "Every year, we will be picking a different mission to help children locally, nationally and internationally."

He said his experience as a goalie for Benedictine's men's soccer team, where he learned to work as part of a team and look out for others, reinforced his decision to help. "Charity is not work but almost a duty for everyone to implement in their lives," Papakostas said. "I always get my kids involved so that they understand the power of giving and working to make an impact in the lives of others through donations."

Every year, Papakostas visits Benedictine at alumni soccer reunions to see old friends and support the team. Both his niece and nephew are current students involved in athletics, and he stops by to watch their games.

"When you had a great experience for four years of your life, it is hard not to stay connected with what the school is doing and what others are doing," he said.

As a student, Papakostas appreciated the different backgrounds and cultures to which he was exposed, and always remembers that no matter the differences, students treated each other with respect.

"This is one of the reasons my soccer academy was named Olympic Soccer Academy," Papakostas said. "The word 'Olympic' to me represents the cultures and ethnicities of people from all over the world coming together as one." ♦

