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Plus **Meet the East Bay's Most
Amazing Volunteers**

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threads of hope

Each December, *Diablo* magazine's annual Threads of Hope Awards recognize an amazing group of volunteers who go above and beyond to make the East Bay a better place. This year, our lineup includes a hero who repairs bicycles and donates them to foster kids, another who makes new crayons out of old ones for children in hospitals, a couple that boxes food for the hungry, and a Major League Baseball All-Star who helps children with special needs. We also recognize a philanthropic visionary who created a crisis nursery that has helped our neediest neighbors for 35 years.

EDITED BY PETER CROOKS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAROYAN HUMPHREY

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Bryan Ware

The Crayon Initiative, Danville

By Casey Cantrell

The figures Bryan Ware rattles off are impressive. Since 2014, The Crayon Initiative has turned nearly 65,000 pounds of donated crayons into roughly 20,000 eight-count packs of new, high-quality crayons, which it delivers to 35 children's hospitals across 12 states. By any measure, the nonprofit has been a huge success.

Just don't tell Ware that.

More than 500,000 pounds of crayons are tossed out per year, says Ware, who founded The Crayon Initiative. "If those crayons were donated, we could make 2.5 million packs," he says. "We could impact the lives of 2.5 million kids in hospitals—not just on a one-time basis, but annually."

And once he gets there? He'll start looking to collect 10 million packs a year.

"That's how I'm wired," says Ware. "I visit these kids at the hospital, then I come home and realize I've given away all my crayons. So, how do I make more faster?"

Ware's ambitions belie the program's humble origins. Five years ago, Ware and his family were enjoying dinner at a restaurant in Danville, when the server brought his two sons a set of crayons. Ware asked the server what happens to the crayons after the kids are done with them and learned that the restaurant was required to throw them away, even if they were untouched.

That night, Ware took the crayons and a spark of an idea home. Soon after, he got busy—partnering with local hospitals, including UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland and John Muir Health; working

with an occupational therapist to create a thicker, user-friendly crayon; purchasing specially designed molds; and of course, learning how to make new crayons from discarded ones.

That last part was a lot of "trial and error," says Ware. Setting up in his kitchen, Ware and a partner melt the crayons by color on hot plates, boiling the wax to kill any bacteria. Then, they pour the wax into the mold and let it cool. In a few minutes, the crayons are ready to be packed away.

The hard work is worth it, though. "I get e-mails and pictures from hospital staff telling me that the crayons helped the kids through their hospital stay," says Ware. "When the kids leave the hospital, this is the only thing they remember that was good."

The next step for The Crayon Initiative is to keep doing more. Last October, inspired by the movie *Chef*, Ware designed a mobile trailer to take the melting process on the road, and he's currently working with hospitals on a coloring book to give out with the crayons.

"We're trying to get these children whatever they need. If we can change their lives for just five minutes—that's what I want do."

How you can help: The Crayon Initiative is looking for a facility to expand its crayon manufacturing. Visit thecrayoninitiative.org for more information.

"Recovering waste before it becomes trash to provide special children with one of the joys of childhood—crayons! It is such a wonderful idea."

—CAROLE WYNSTRA
Former president, Walnut Creek
Library Foundation

