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Women's tea party with a cause

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The holidays were fast approaching in the fall of 2004 when Deborah Muse-Carty challenged her two daughters, then 10 and 15 years old, to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate.

"They decided they wanted to do something that had an immediate beneficial impact on needy families," Muse-Carty said. The result was the first annual Mother and Daughter Charity Tea held the Saturday before Christmas in the Carty family home in Piscataway.

"We had about 15 people," Muse-Carty said, family and friends invited by word of mouth.

The girls asked local women known as good bakers to make them cakes for the tea and were rewarded with gourmet offerings like the Southern classic, red velvet cake, coconut pineapple and German chocolate.

The girls, Kiara, now 17, and Nia, 12, collected clothing during the tea and donated it to local agencies that help the needy.

"I think, because we are grateful for whatever we have, we have to give back," Muse-Carty said. "The holiday season is not all about buying presents."

The girls loved it.

"My mom and I are on the same wavelength," Kiara said. "I told my mother I wanted to help the world and she said I had to start somewhere."

Last year's tea attracted 60 mothers and daughters who provided eight boxes of clothing for the needy.

Excited by the success of their venture, the girls and their mother have created the Tea Party Charitable Foundation to fund a scholarship for a deserving young woman going to college in September 2007.

The scholarship would be funded through the \$20 charged each participant of this year's tea, scheduled for Dec. 17 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Piscataway. The mothers and daughters who attend will also be asked to bring gently used girl's clothing.

"We had to move it outside the house because we didn't have enough room for everyone," Muse-Carty said. "We're expecting a minimum of 100 this year."

The upstart organization still relies on invitations to drive attendance at the event. The girls asked participants from the year before for the names of three families each that they could invite this year.

"We don't have a budget for advertising," their mother noted.

The girls also founded Tea Party and Things, a greeting card business with a Web site (www.teapartyandthings.com) to help fund the annual tea. Nia, the artist of the two, designs the cards and invitations offered for sale.

"I enjoy drawing, so this is doing something I love to do and helping people at the same time," Nia said.

Kiara said her charitable ventures are just laying the groundwork for her life's dream.

"I want to be a philanthropist," she said. "I plan to go to college and graduate school after I graduate this year from high school. I want to build a huge business empire and then donate the money I make to help people in need."

The girls have donated clothing to several agencies in Middlesex County and in Trenton. This year, they plan to donate the clothing to a South African school for the deaf and a women's shelter.

"Mothers and Daughters strengthens family ties as they enjoy tea, cake, poetry and a talent showcase, while contributing to a worthy cause," Muse-Carty said.

As for her daughters, she said, "I am very proud of them. I gave them a challenge and they ran with it."

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