

## Teacher receives a unique thank-you

By NATALIA BAAGE-LORD

Bedford Hills Elementary School teacher Susan Bretti Smiled as she opened a tin filled with blank stationery gift cards, touched that a former student took the time out of his busy high-school schedule to send the school a “thank-you” gift.

Before the December holidays, Kirk Atkinson, a junior at Fox Lane High School, sent gifts of stationery tins to his alma mater. The gesture was part of his “Thanks Teach” project, in which he uses the greeting card tins from his mother’s stationery store Tumbalina to show appreciation for the educator.

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*‘Many people remember their teachers, but Kirk did something about it.’*

— SUSAN BRETTI, TEACHER

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“It feels great,” said Kirk. It’s nice community work. They all loved it. They’re all thankful for it. Not every kid does this. They are all so thankful.”

Kirk was inspired to give a tin of cards to his old elementary school after he gifted one to his current chemistry teacher, Sherry Dudeck. He said that Ms. Dudeck is a “wonderful” teacher and he wanted to show her his appreciation. When he presented her with the tin of stationery cards, Kirk recalled, she said that she “loved it.”

From there, he sought to honor his former elementary school, in particular, his then-fourth-grade teacher, Stephanie Ross, who is now teaching third grade. Kirk said that Ms. Ross really stood out, that she was one of his nicest teachers who had “the biggest impact” on her students.

Seven years later, Ms. Ross still remembers teaching Kirk.

“Kirk is a child that I will never forget,” she said. “He was kind, thoughtful and always enthusiastic about learning. You hope that you are making an impact on students’ lives each year, but it really feels good when you hear that you made a difference in a child’s life -- even if it is seven years later.”

Ms. Ross said although she was touched to receive the tin from Kirk’s



Student Kirk Atkinson stands between teacher Stephanie Ross and principal Zbynek Gold.

“Thanks Teach” project, she was not surprised by his generosity. When he was in fourth grade, he made a personalized wooden sign for her classroom that she still cherishes.

Bedford Hills Elementary School principal Zbynek Gold said he was grateful to receive the stationery gift cards in December. He was also proud of Kirk for giving back to his primary school. Mr. Gold began working at the school in 2007 and met Kirk as a fifth grader.

Mr. Gold said that Kirk’s efforts were special because while every student has a favorite teacher, a letter of appreciation is typically sent, not a gift for the whole school.

“Many people remember their teachers, but Kirk did something about it. Mrs. Bretti did.” It raised awareness of former students. It’s a real nice payit forward idea.”

Mrs. Bretti added that teachers always keep what their students --

past or present --- give them, but this “thank-you” gift was “above and beyond” and well-liked by the staff, who have since put the cards to good use.

Ms. Ross said she was delighted to hear that Kirk had teamed up with his mother for his “Thanks Teach” project. She said that Ms. Atkinson has had her stationery company for years and she had enjoyed receiving Ms. Atkinson’s cards.

“Kirk has a wonderful family who loves him dearly and supports him,” Mrs. Ross said. “[Oak’s] stationery was beautiful then and still is now. The teachers at Bedford Hills were all very appreciative of this special gift that will come into great use.”

Kirk’s community service effort was put into action quickly. Within a month of discussing the idea with his mother, Bedford Hills Elementary School received a “Thanks Teach” stationery tin.

Kirk does not plan to stop there. Since gifting the stationery tin to Bedford Hills Elementary School --- and between football, hockey and lacrosse practices --- Kirk has also made plans to do the same at other local schools. He has already contacted Bedford Village, Pound Ridge, West Patent and Mount Kisco elementary schools. Ms. Atkinson added that they might approach Katonah-Lewisboro School District next.

Kirk said he would like to open the “Thanks Teach” gifting program to other schools throughout Westchester county too. While Kirk has no personal connections to the other schools, he said that all teachers do the same jobs and they all deserve the same respect and appreciation, no matter who it comes from.

For more information about Kirk’s “Thanks Teach” community service project, visit [ThanksTeach.org](http://ThanksTeach.org).