

Kindland™

I can't pinpoint the first time Stuart Muszynski reached out to collaborate with our newsroom on promoting kindness, but I remember my reaction:

Nope.

It was 2020, and our laser focus on covering the pandemic stretched our resources beyond anything you might call reasonable, and here was a guy wanting us to focus on acts of kindness. And, let's face it, we're a bunch of cynical SOBs in a newsroom, so a saccharine diet of kindness is not on our plate.

We did ask reporter Bob Higgs to write a story about the initiative, and we referred Stuart to our president, Brad Harmon, in case they could work out something outside of the newsroom.

Stuart was nonplussed. He kept working on his Kindland concept, though his Values In Action Foundation, building it bigger and bigger. And sending us press releases. We've written occasional updates on Stuart's progress (including Brenda Cain's piece this week) and published guest columns from Stuart and others about it.

But, it was too easy to dismiss Stuart's group as just another non-profit in Cleveland's congested sea of non-profits, most seeking publicity for their specific causes.

Then, last month, Skip Hall and the team that curates our national and international news pages in The Plain Dealer selected a piece from the

Washington Post about how stories on kindness relieve the angst caused by reading bad news.

Researcher Kathryn Buchanan published a year-long study in a peer-reviewed journal in which she created scales to measure how people felt after reading the news. Some read only distressing news. Some read distressing news followed by a piece about a heroic act or something lighthearted. The first group, as you might imagine, felt more pessimism about humanity after reading, while the other group had less negative emotions along with a more optimistic view of the world.

“The negative exposure we have in the media makes us think that the world is more dangerous than it really is,” she told the Post. “Seeing others’ kindness helps us maintain this belief that the world isn’t that bad.”

More important, she found that stories about acts of kindness were more powerful than others. People reading about acts of kindness get a special feeling called elevation – a “warm, fuzzy feeling in the chest,” and “an immediate rush of wanting to be a better person,” she told the Post.

As I read that story, I thought of Stuart. It’s what he’s been saying for years. Acts of kindness spawn acts of kindness and make for a better world. He’s devoted his life to it. His website counts the acts of kindness his followers record. He’s in schools across the country, persuading students to be kind. And he is trying to make Cleveland the center of it all, as Kindland.

So, here I am, in an organization that covers distressing news that can make people more pessimistic. And there is Stuart, collecting the kinds of stories about kindness that can counteract the stress that comes from reading bad news. Seems pretty clear what we should be doing.

I reached out to Stuart to see if we might collaborate. He was already working with David Knight, our chief revenue officer, to spread his message more effectively, so last week, Brad, David and I sat down with Stuart and his director of community partnerships, Shaun Sweet, to talk about collaborating.

I cannot be more impressed with this man and his mission. It’s a saintly thing to devote your waking hours to spreading kindness. He’s logged more than 60 million acts of kindness since he started: volunteering at food

pantries, reading stories to others, writing thank you notes to public servants and many more.

We're still working out details of the collaboration, which Stuart will announce Sept. 22 at his Kindland Summit at Cleveland State University. (It's free. [You can find details and register here.](#)) Once it's announced, we'll provide more details.

Why wait, though? You can join the kindness trend now. Just visit the [Kindland website](#).

We hope it gives you that elevation discussed in the study, the immediate rush to be a better person.

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Thanks for reading.



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