Extraordinary Senior: Emmy Specht's eye-opening trip to Cambodia inspires charity

Senior Amelia "Emmy" Specht of The Stony Brook School. Specht cofounded Four Girls for Families, an organization whose initial goal was providing water filters to people in Cambodia. Credit: Newsday/John Paraskevas

By Joe Dziemianowicz
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Amelia “Emmy” Specht is known by fellow students at The Stony Brook School as “The Girl With the Charity,” she said.
Makes sense. Specht, 17, has spent more than half of her life developing ways to help others — whether in Southeast Asia or around the corner in Bellport.

Specht’s mission began after a family trip to Cambodia, where her father, who’s in toy manufacturing, travels for business. For Specht, the “super-amazing” Temples of Angkor were eclipsed by seeing people living without basics, including safe drinking water.

“It was eye-opening,” said Specht, who took stock of her own comfortable lifestyle. “I knew it would be wrong to do nothing.”

In 2010 she cofounded Four Girls for Families, an organization whose initial goal was providing water filters. Since then it has raised more than $300,000 to fund houses, schools, wells and filtration systems in rural Cambodia. A $55,000 grant, secured through local Rotary Clubs and Rotary International, enabled the group to focus on sustainable farming. They’re now working on a second global grant.

Specht’s good works have made a difference on Long Island. She has worked with pediatric cancer patients as a volunteer at Sunrise Day Camp in Wyandanch, and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, she organized a Suffolk County food drive.
“Emmy is a good-hearted person who cares about people for who they are — no matter about color or ethnicity or straight or gay,” said her mother, Joanne Specht, 54, who works in advertising. “Emmy is a friend to everyone.”

Christine Loo, Stony Brook’s director of college counseling, echoed that sentiment. “Character before career” is the school’s motto. “Emmy embodies it so well,” she said. “She leaves everywhere she goes to a better place.”

That’s a worthwhile challenge, said Emmy. “It’s not hard to find ways to help people, even in small ways. There are people in need everywhere.”

**HIGHER ED:** Specht will attend University of Chicago, where she’ll major in environmental studies.

**FRESHMAN YEAR:** “I’m really excited to learn from everybody I meet and hear their stories and to wholeheartedly indulge my academic interests.”

**DURING THE PANDEMIC, I LEARNED:** “Communities have an incredible way of coming together when times are hard. Even when they have their own challenges, people are so willing to support a good cause.”