

LONG ISLAND LI LIFE

Hometown Hero: Ashley Felsberg of Bellmore collected 3,000 balloons to protect environment



Ashley Felsberg with some of the balloons she collected for Balloon Mission. Credit: Linda Rosier

By Michael R. Ebert

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A Bellmore teen is flying high after collecting more than 3,000 used balloons to help protect the environment.

Ashley Felsberg, a senior at Wellington C. Mepham High School, recently accumulated 3,090 balloons — about a dozen large garbage bags' worth — from local florists and party planning businesses. Many of the balloons were left over from Valentine's Day, she said.

The balloons were then picked up by representatives of Balloon Mission, a Merrick-based organization that finds "good end-of-use solutions for them," according to its website.

"I was very shocked, because I didn't even realize I had collected that much," said Felsberg, 17, who pursued the project as part of the community service requirement for her school's Science Honor Society.

"It was great to take as many balloons as I could and put them toward a good cause, instead of having them get into the ocean or into the sky."

Balloons, which are made of materials like mylar and latex, pose a danger to animals that become entangled in the strings or eat pieces of the balloons, which can harm or even kill them, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The balloons collected by Felsberg will be repurposed by Balloon Mission in several ways, including as environmental art in workshops with the Long Island Children's Museum. Other balloon materials go to companies like TerraCycle, where they are melted down into plastic pellets and turned into industrial flooring or pallets, the organization said.

Balloon Mission's founder and executive director, Cynthia Seibold, called Felsberg's collection "an astonishing amount" for an individual. She also commended Felsberg for her idea to work with florists and party planners to keep balloons out of the environment.

"Ashley has pioneered a new environmental path . . . ensuring that these balloons are properly disposed of, saving animals from this harmful litter," Seibold said. "We hope to continue the relationships she has forged."

Felsberg's efforts were also praised by Heather Bizewski, the science chairwoman for the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District.

“She truly has embraced the Balloon Mission initiative, and we couldn’t be prouder of her work and the positive impact it is having on our community,” Bizewski said.

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