

## **GETTING DOWN AND DIRTY WITH LEND A HAND**

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**From TODAY producer Molly Palmer**

**Today was the first day of Al Roker's annual Lend a Hand charity and my first time working on this incredible part of our show.**



**When my boss asked me and my colleague Ian Wenger to produce a piece on the Los Angeles-based charity A Chance For Children, I wasn't expecting whale watching, truck operation or granola storage -- but I got a taste of all of the above. Throughout my three and a half years as a Los Angeles-based associate producer for TODAY, I've had the chance to do some amazing things that aren't part of my job description. This experience was no exception.**

**Before Lend a Hand, I'd never done any fundraising and when I was told that my first set of "pallets" had arrived on our Burbank lot, I was sure they went with the watercolor sets that Glidden paints had donated. It turns out that pallets are the large wood structures that hold tons of boxes, but apparently I'm one of the only people who didn't already know that.**

**I've spent the last three weeks calling companies like Sony, Crocs and Speedo to ask if they'd donate needed products to our charity. I also worked with other generous companies, like Naked Juice, to figure out where we'd store products that required refrigeration. I wasn't able to find a place for 250 cases of Naked Juice, so the company had to meet us this morning to deliver their donation in a refrigerated truck. They are sending most of the juice to A Chance For Children directly when**

**the charity is able to make some room.**



**I learned what over 4,000 pounds of Attune granola bars looks like and how to operate the lift on a 26-foot truck. I found it all fascinating, but wasn't able to fully appreciate how exciting my new responsibilities were until I met the kids who were going to benefit from our work.**

**Our TODAY team first spent a day by the water with some of the kids with whom the organization's founders, Greg Bonann and Tai Collins, work. A few of them were stepping onto a boat for the very first time, and if it's possible, I think I had more fun than they did!**

**We left the dock in Marina Del Rey, Calif., on a real "Baywatch" lifeguard boat. The boats don't have that painted on their side because of the famous television show, but it was actually these boats that inspired Bonann, the "Baywatch" show creator.**



Shortly after our departure, we were looking at a whale just off the shore and watched as a coast guard rescue diver dropped out of a helicopter and swam over to our boat. He talked to the kids about his job, explaining that it took a lot of discipline and hard work, and certainly required staying in school. The kids were full of questions and hanging on to his every word before he swam back to the rope floating on the ocean surface and was pulled back into the helicopter. The day continued with surf lessons on the beach and scuba lessons in the Pepperdine University pool in Malibu. By the end of the day, I was in love with this charity and the experiences they offer hundreds of at-risk children every year. I was even more determined to help outfit them with the swimsuits they needed for camp, the computers that would expose them to a whole new world, and the cameras that would allow them to view their potential with a fresh outlook.

Not only was I impressed with the generosity and kindness that Bonann, Collins and their amazing volunteers displayed, but I was pleasantly surprised by how many companies were willing to help our charity during this tough economic time. I'm going to bed today, 26 hours after I woke up yesterday, proud of this incredible project and grateful to foundations like A Chance for Children, as well as the companies and organizations that see the importance of giving kids a real shot.

