

# SMALLTALK

about big ideas

## Kindness: One Word, Eight Letters, Big Meaning

**By Jennifer Boykin**  
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Last week, I was fortunate to hear an essay that left a lasting impression on me.

I was attending a United Way of the Virginia Peninsula celebration event, and the essay won first place in a United Way-sponsored elementary school essay contest. It was about kindness, and it was written by Dare Elementary School Fifth Grader Gracie Morehouse. In the essay, Gracie shared a conversation she had with her father. She wanted to make a big change in the world, and her father told her that if she could help one person in need, it would be a big change for that person.

Gracie understood what her father meant. When she was in the fourth grade, Gracie's teacher showed her kindness she described as life changing. In her essay, she summed it up this way: "Kindness is doing something because you honestly care, and because you care, you take action. Even the smallest act of kindness amounts to something, and little by little, the more we care, the more we act, the better things will be."

Gracie's words were simple; her message powerful. Her essay reaffirmed my commitment to United Way, a cause I've supported since my first day with the company and one I will continue to support when Newport News Shipbuilding's 2019 "Kindness Creates Community" campaign kicks off March 4. Every penny donated will go directly toward helping people in need—people in our own communities—and even one dollar will show kindness and make a big difference.

I know, because like Gracie, I have been on the receiving end of kindness. Growing up as the middle of five children, my family benefited from many United Way partner organizations that helped shaped who I am today.

And I'm proud to lead a company whose employees demonstrate kindness in so many ways. Our employees have helped build a total 16 Habitat for Humanity homes, donated thousands of pounds of food to the Virginia Peninsula Food Bank, donated an average 1,100 pints of blood per year, and so much more.

We also have people like X36 Master Shipbuilder Marjorie West who quietly show kindness in their own way. For 10 years, Marjorie mentored a child with Big Brothers, Big Sisters. She spent one day a week with a little girl from a troubled home. The pair biked together, walked together, spent time together. Marjorie was her safe person—someone the little girl could talk to and trust. And for Marjorie, the little girl was the child to love that she always wanted. Marjorie described the experience as "an honor" that gave her a greater sense of wellbeing.

Kindness is rewarding, and in the words of 11-year-old Gracie Morehouse, kindness doesn't have to be hard. It's one word, eight letters, but it represents a big meaning.

As Virginia's largest industrial employer, we have the ability to make a big difference. Thank you for the kindness you show every day. I will always continue my commitment, and I hope you will, too. United Way is a lot like the shipyard. The organization doesn't run away from a problem—it runs toward it. Let's run with them and share the kindness our community deserves.



*(From left) Jennifer Boykin, Gracie Morehouse and Terrie Edwards, United Way of the Virginia Peninsula's 2019 campaign chairwoman, posed for a photo during the United Way's celebration event last week.*