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COVID-19 RESPONSE

## **WHEN FACE SHIELDS RAN SHORT, BEVERAGE COMPANIES MOBILIZED TO HELP THEIR HOSPITALS**

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When tough times hit communities, neighbors always seem to answer the call to help their fellow neighbors in need – often in creative and meaningful ways.

This creativity is certainly rising to the top as several beverage companies help their local hospitals meet needs for face shields to protect nurses, doctors and health aides tending to coronavirus patients.

In Massachusetts, a friend told Carolyn Crowley Stimpson about a doctor friend of hers whose small clinic couldn't get any shields. Stimpson, a co-owner of Polar Beverages of Worcester, figured they could fashion shields out of unused 2-liter PET bottles. An engineer friend made them 3D printer headbands, they got a design on YouTube for the shields and went to work.

"The family just started doing them at our dining room table," she said.



Carolyn Crowley Stimpson's husband John Stimpson (left) and son Chris Stimpson (right) make face shields out of bottles at the dining room table.

Chris Crowley, Polar's vice president and brother to Carolyn, said the idea took off. They dropped off hundreds of masks to an appreciative neighbor and president of the region's major medical center. Friends told them of assisted living facilities that needed help.

Soon grocery stores and other essential service retailers were calling asking for thousands. They made a **"How to" video** so others could join in, and the effort has gone viral.



Ray Dube, sustainability manager,  
Coca-Cola Beverages Northeast

“It’s tough times,” said Chris Crowley said. “These people on the front lines, we all got to take care of them.”

Bill Schongar heard about the problem from his community workshop **Makelt Labs** in Nashua, N.H. Local hospitals in the Granite State needed personal protective gear fast. Schongar felt his volunteers could make them in a hurry if they had some sturdy plastic, so one of his folks called a friend, Ray Dube, at Coca-Cola Beverages Northeast.

Dube, Northeast’s sustainability manager, quickly connected Makelt volunteers with Coca-Cola plastic recycler **UltrePet** and packaging manufacturer **EasyPak** to donate 6,000 pounds of clear PET sheeting. Coke Northeast delivery trucks picked it up and transported it to Nashua.

“The response was amazing,” said Schongar, president of Makelt Labs. “I’ve never been prouder of our people and the community.”



Bill Schongar, president of Makelt Labs, Nashua, N.H.

The folks at Northeast were just excited to know that bottle plastic could protect their hometown heroes.

“For us it’s all about the community,” Dube said. “They’re our customers, our employees, our friends.”

Once they had the plastic Makelt volunteers got to work, some of them using their vacation time to do it. Their goal was to get 500 face shields to nearby hospitals. Because of all the material donated they’ve gone way beyond that. At last count, 50,000 face shields have been shipped out all over the country.

The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta got involved as well, working with packaging supplier Sonoco to transport another 6,000 pounds of plastic sheeting from Sonoco’s warehouse in North Carolina to Georgia Tech in Atlanta, where Tech students and others are using it to make tens of thousands of plastic surgical shields.

“I’ve never been prouder of our people and the community,” said Schongar, whose workshop has set up a [website](#) where makers of plastic and volunteers can connect to get more shields out there.

Further south, in Greenville, S.C., the husband of a nurse practitioner was worried that his wife was in danger of getting the virus while working long hours at Bon Secours St. Francis Health System. He got the idea of making her a face shield out of one of their empty 2-liter Pepsi bottles. When she went to work the reaction from co-workers was, “How could they get a hold of one?”



**Carolyn Crowley Stimpson of Polar Beverages dons one of the personal protection shields made out of Polar Beverages 2-liter bottles.**

They turned to their local Pepsi distributor, Pepsi of Greenville, S.C., for help.

Carolina Canners Inc., a manufacturing co-op for several independent Pepsi bottlers including Pepsi of Greenville, S.C., Pepsi of Florence, S.C. and Minges Bottling Group of Ayden, N.C., delivered a batch of bottles.

Other hospitals saw what was going on and reached out to see if their employees could use this unique protective gear too. McLeod Health in Florence, S.C., requested 1,000 2-liter bottles. A similar request came in from a hospital in Greenville, N.C.

“It’s our obligation to do everything we can to support these heroes so that they may continue doing what they do best – selflessly serve our communities,” said Jeff Minges, chief executive officer and chairman of Minges Bottling Group.

“It really warmed my heart to know that, in addition to providing much needed beverages for families in our communities during this difficult time, we could offer assistance to local medical professionals,” said Jeff Stevens, CEO of Carolina Canners.

Carolyn Crowley Stimpson agrees, saying it’s like baking a casserole for a neighbor when they need a hand.

“Our casserole was bottles, and we just happen to have a lot of them” she said.