

Tucson Region

Ben's Bellings

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The recipient of this week's Ben's Bell is Dan Johnson, executive director of the Wellness Council of Arizona.

Johnson was nominated by co-workers Danielle Moustakas and Kyrsten Carter. They described him as a truly kind person who's helped countless people learn to live healthier lives by discussing lifestyle choices, physical activity, nutrition, stress reduction and other topics with them.

Johnson gives 250 talks a year through his job — and travels about 40,000 miles around the state for speaking engagements. The Wellness Council is a nonprofit organization that was founded 21 years ago and works with health-care providers, community leaders and businesses to improve the health of employees and their families. Johnson's been there for 12 years.



Jeannette Maré-Packard, who spearheads the Ben's Bells project, presents a bell to Dan Johnson of the Wellness Council.

"Dan is just an amazing person," Moustakas said. "I can't tell you how many people have come up and told me that he's changed their lives."

The health promotion specialist was wrapping up her job this week, preparing to move to New York City. The bellings on Wednesday was a great way to say goodbye, she said. She listens to the Ben's Bells feature on the radio every week and knew Johnson was a good candidate.

"The first time I heard it, I thought it was perfect for Dan," she said.

The Ben's Bells folks visited the council's office Wednesday and surprised Johnson.

"I felt very special, but I also felt unworthy," he said. "I'm just fortunate to have the job I have."

As for his secret to being kind, Johnson said he has two mentors: his wife, Melinda, and daughter, Makenna, 8.

"I'm a better person because of both of them," he said.

The Ben's Bells project began in March 2003, one year after Ben Maré Packard died of croup, just before his third birthday. His family hopes it reminds people to be kind, to help ease one another's pain.

The latest phase of the project began in September, weekly "bellings" for those among us who make our community a better, kinder place to live.

If you know people who deserve a Ben's Bell, nominate them to be "Belled." Go to www.929themountain.com/pages/jennie_itm.html and click on Ben's Bellings. To learn more about the project, go to www.bensbells.org. Or help work on bells by dropping by the studio, 816 E. University, in Geronimo Plaza. It's open Friday 4-7 and Saturday 10-3.

And check the Star each Saturday to see the latest recipient.

- *L. Anne Newell*