



MoverMoms volunteers, from left: Rebecca Kahlenberg of Bethesda, Heidi Bumpers of Cabin John and Salma Hasan Ali of Potomac. Standing on the truck is Amanda Kahlenberg.

MICHAEL VENTURA

## MOVED TO HELP

One mother's outreach inspires an entire corps of volunteer moms

By Ellen Ryan

Long before the awards and the recognition and the national media attention, Rebecca Kahlenberg was just trying to perk up her social life.

In 2006, the freelance writer and mother of four invited a few fellow Bethesda-area mothers out for a "fun Friday" monastery tour, followed by other outings. The next year, she mentioned serving dinner at the Children's Inn at the National Institutes of Health, where families can stay while their children undergo treatment for serious illnesses. The other moms thought volunteering there might be a

good outing. So Kahlenberg approached the folks at the Children's Inn. Great, they said: Please bring dinner for 85 people.

*Eighty-five!* That would take more than the usual handful of friends. Kahlenberg sent out an e-mail and "even people who didn't come offered to contribute," she says. She gathered nearly a dozen helpers and "I thought, wow, maybe we should volunteer regularly."

Out went Fun Fridays; in came MoverMoms—Moms' Own Volunteering Experiences and Retreats, "though we have yet to have a retreat." That March, the women compiled care packages for area hospital patients.

Then in April, the Virginia Tech massacre occurred. Kahlenberg's dining room became command central for more care packages, this time for traumatized students staying on campus during exam week. Two cargo vans drove to Blacksburg with some 2,000 boxes of goodies and encouraging notes.

Local news media picked up the story. In days, membership swelled to 50.

"Rebecca makes a point of finding a variety of causes and times so we get a great mix of working women and stay-at-home moms, kids, even dads," says vice president and co-founder Heidi Bumpers of Cabin John. More than 150 are on the mailing list, though many do just a project a year or only attend the group's book club, which selects books with uplifting themes, such as *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin (2006).

Taking on one to two projects a month, members have donated clothing to Rachael's Women's Center, collected apples at a Lees-