

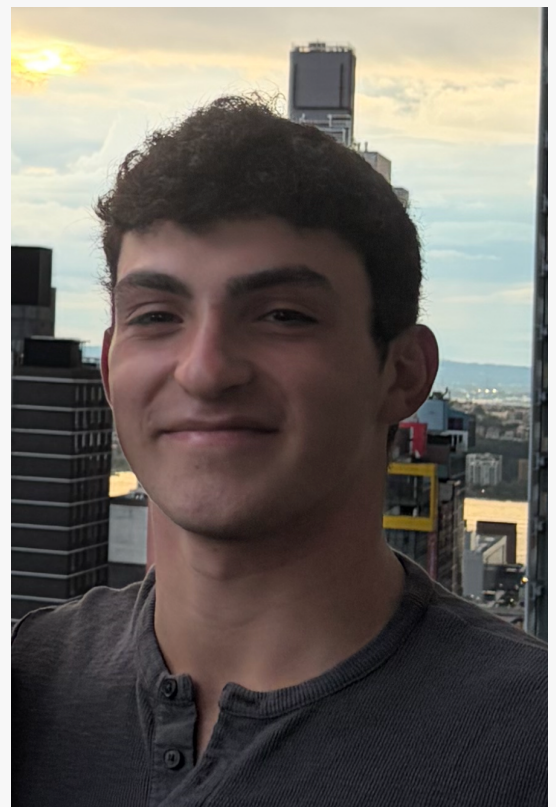
New Jersey Students Create The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund, Raising Over \$8,000 for Local Charities

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In a time when disagreement often feels easier to find than common ground, even close-knit communities can begin to feel strained. Alex Finkelstein saw that tension in the way everyday conversations, whether between loved ones, neighbors, or even strangers online, could quickly become defined by what people disagreed on instead of what they shared. For Finkelstein, that larger sense of division was not only something happening on the news. As a youth basketball coach and umpire, Finkelstein often found himself modeling patience and conflict resolution in the middle of games, not only for young players, but sometimes for the passionate spectators watching from the stands.

After seeing how quickly small disagreements could reveal larger divides, Finkelstein began thinking about the potential for a simple community tradition that could remind Millburn and Short Hills, New Jersey residents that the people around them, even if their viewpoints may differ, are part of the same shared community.

Plagued by the weekly disputes and knowing that every tradition has to begin somewhere, he got together with his friends Matthew Petersen and Ronan Moon, who were also noticing the need for more connection in their community. Together, they co-founded [The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created to unite the community through a shared town-wide experience while raising money for local charities.



Alex Finkelstein

The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund invites residents to purchase and display luminary bags outside their homes, along driveways, sidewalks, and neighborhood streets on a designated night. As the lanterns light up neighborhoods across Millburn and Short Hills, the event creates a shared celebration of light and connection while raising money for nonprofit organizations serving the local community. The Fund's mission is to create something meaningful that celebrates Millburn and Short Hills using a simple visual to remind residents that they are part of

one shared community.

To bring the idea to life, Finkelstein, Petersen, and Moon turned the Luminary Fund into a town-wide effort. To keep the fundraiser accessible, they researched cost-effective suppliers and built an online ordering system with QR codes that made it easy for residents to purchase luminary bags. To spread the word, they created social media marketing materials, designed flyers, connected with local businesses and community partners, and set up an outreach booth on Halloween where they shared information about Luminary Night with neighbors while handing out candy. Behind the scenes, the team coordinated volunteers, organized orders, and planned distribution routes so thousands of luminary bags could be delivered across Millburn and Short Hills.

The nonprofit partnered with Down the Block, the Millburn-Short Hills Volunteer First Aid Squad, and the Millburn Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry to expand the event's reach and direct funds toward organizations serving residents throughout the community. Proceeds from luminary bag sales went toward grants for local nonprofits, allowing the event to support neighbors facing immediate needs while also creating a broader sense of community participation.

One of the biggest challenges the team had to manage was New Jersey's winter weather. Because the Luminary Night depended on residents displaying the lanterns outside their homes, they had to keep a close eye on weather forecasts and ultimately needed to adjust the event timing, pushing it back a day to avoid rain that could damage the bags or disrupt the community



Matthew Petersen, Ronan Moon, and Alex Finkelstein celebrating a successful luminary night



Moon, Finkelstein, and Petersen promoting The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund

experience. Finkelstein, Petersen, and Moon also took potential wind into account by including sandbags in each order, giving residents a simple way to keep the luminaries steady throughout the night.

The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund far surpassed expectations in its first year, selling more than 4,000 luminary bags and raising over \$8,000 for local charities and community members in need. As homes across Millburn and Short Hills lit up on the same night, the event transformed neighborhood streets, sidewalks, and driveways into a shared moment of light and connection, giving residents a simple way to show up for one another. The Luminary Fund also received local attention from [Millburn & Short Hills Magazine](#), which highlighted Finkelstein, Petersen, and Moon's mission to bring the community together while supporting local causes, as well as an opportunity for the co-founders to present the initiative at a member dinner for Down the Block.

For Finkelstein, watching the community come together around a new tradition he helped create was one of the most rewarding parts of the experience. "I wanted to create something positive that would unite our town," Finkelstein shared. "This experience taught me that even a simple idea can make a meaningful impact when paired with dedication, teamwork, and perseverance. I also learned valuable leadership, organizational, and problem-solving skills that I will carry with me in the future."

What makes The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund stand out is that participation was built into the experience itself. Residents were not only donating to local charities through their luminary



Homes across Millburn and Short Hills, New Jersey displaying luminary bags



Luminary bags lining a neighborhood house's entryway

bag purchases, but taking part in a visible town-wide display that made the fundraiser feel personal, communal, and connected to the place they all call home. As the Luminary Fund continues to grow in the coming years, Finkelstein and his co-founders plan to train future students to carry the nonprofit's tradition forward after they graduate, ensuring Luminary Night remains a lasting community effort that continues bringing neighbors together while supporting organizations serving Millburn and Short Hills.

To support Alex Finkelstein and learn more about The Millburn-Short Hills Luminary Fund, please share the nonprofit with anyone connected to the Millburn and Short Hills, New Jersey communities. Community members can [follow @luminaryfundofmsh on Instagram](#) for updates on the next Luminary Night, luminary bag sales, and ways to get involved. For questions about the organization, please contact luminaryfundofmsh@gmail.com.

About Alex Finkelstein

Alex Finkelstein is a student at Millburn High School in Millburn, New Jersey. He is the Editor in Chief of The Miller, Millburn High School's student newspaper, and a varsity baseball player.

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