



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Family assembly line manufactures protective gear

The MWRD's Lopatka family lends their talents to front-line workers



Sylvia and Mark Lopatka and daughter Ana keep face shield production moving at home. The shields not only aid medical workers and emergency responders but also their fellow MWRD staff.

A Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) couple is making productive use of their family time while sheltering in place during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), helping both their co-workers, emergency responders and the medical community.

Mark and Sylvia Lopatka and daughter Ana have volunteered their time and resources to equip frontline workers with homemade face shields. They initially sent a test product to Sylvia's cousin, a doctor in Houston, and when he replied to send more, the assembly line went in overdrive. More than 500 face shields and 90 pounds of plastic later, the demand for their compassionate philanthropy is booming.

Mark Lopatka, a senior computer systems administrator in the MWRD's IT Department, and Sylvia,



a supervising budget and management analyst in the MWRD's Engineering Department, said they initially began wondering how to replace the 3.5 hours of commuting each day to and from their Palos Park home. Mark learned about the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the medical field and read about a 3D printer manufacturer in the Czech Republic that was printing and donating face shields.

"I knew right away what our family project would be since we have a small fleet of 3D printers," Mark said. "I just had no idea how big it would become."

He found approved designs on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' website, began testing his operations and soon realized with a few extra hands that the Lopatka face shield operations could be up and running. Like a wartime effort, the *(continued)*

Family assembly line manufactures protective gear, *cont.*

Lopatkas all started pitching in to support frontline workers. Mark handles the manufacturing and sourcing of raw materials; Ana punches holes in the clear sheets that attach to the parts; and Sylvia manages the packaging and shipping. The finished product has been a resounding success and an incredibly important one.

They have not only equipped their local police and fire departments in Palos Park but also shipped several hundred face shields to the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Symphony of Joliet, and several independent dentist and doctor offices, including locally at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. They realized that they can also assist their coworkers at the MWRD's seven water reclamation plants, where another version of front-line workers is bravely treating the region's wastewater.

"Our water environment benefits from a talented team of resourceful and ingenious MWRD employees, who continue to give their best during difficult times," said MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita. "The Lopatka family exhibits these skills on the job and at home, where their production line of face shields inspires us all."

Despite having to replace four bearings, three sensors, two fans, two nozzles, and one timing belt on their 3D printers, Mark said they are not asking for donations themselves.

"Our country and really the entire world are in both a health crisis as well as in economic trouble," Mark said. "We all need to do what we can to help both issues. Both Sylvia and I are fortunate to be able to continue our work from home, while many others around us are not. We need to give back. We will not accept any donations either because this is something that we can afford to do."



Ana Lopatka models one of the family's face shields that will protect front-line workers.

It has also turned into a productive and fun family experience. After regular MWRD hours and sixth grader Ana's homework are complete for the day, they play cards or watch a movie, and then before long they return to the home factory to turn out more shields, and package and ship them off to their heroes on the front line.

"One day life will return to normal," Mark said. "But this time we have spent together working to keep others safe is something that will last forever."

"I would like to thank Mark, Sylvia and Ana for reminding us that we are all in this together," said Commissioner Marcelino Garcia.

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Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrld.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.