

# SmartGAME®: Empowerment Meets Smart Power



Inspirational: Amazing Grace, still lighting up lives.

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From the Heartbreak to Heroism file come Joan Bucchino and Amazing Grace, the angelic inspiration behind two distinct empowerment efforts.

Bucchino, who lost her 13-year-old daughter to the rare metabolic disorder Sanfilippo syndrome in 2014, is the creator of SmartGAME®, a series of six-week pay-it-forward challenges designed to empower youngsters while promoting kind and healthy habits. SMARTgame® is useful for all youngsters and was created because of the learning needs of one very special little girl.

The game is distributed by Bucchino's Huntington-based 2008 startup, [J. Grace Corp.](#), which boasts a second for-profit vertical with a beneficial bent: Leveraging Bucchino's background in sales – she was an advertising account executive for the New York Daily News and a Xerox account manager – J. Grace Corp. is a distributor of energy-efficient LED lighting systems.

Working with Valley Steam innovator [Precise LED](#) and other manufacturers – “I can supply any brand,” Bucchino noted – the environmentally friendly middleman matches LED-installation rebate programs to clients' needs. An approved distributor with PSEG-LI, New York City utility Con Edison, and Central Hudson Energy Group, the company occupies a sweet spot in the energy-efficiency chain, according to Bucchino.

The LED sales are going well – Bucchino noted fertile hunting in “large multifamily buildings” and shares some intriguing cross-promotional ties with SmartGAME®.

The game is designed to involve not only kids but caregivers, teachers and even local community members, giving J. Grace Corp.'s energy-conscious clientele a unique opportunity to support several causes, including their own.



Goodie bag: The Love My Planet challenge includes seedlings to plant, among other positive reinforcers.

The most popular SmartGAME®, especially among J. Grace Corp.'s educational clients, has been Love My Planet, a six-week sustainability quest stressing basic environmentalism.

"It's called SmartGAME® because it magnifies a child's ability to learn wellness practices," Bucchino said. "It focuses them on daily actions and brings in their parents, teachers and community as a joined group." That creates a "collective thumbs up" when the kids hit their marks – self-empowerment nirvana for youngsters who thrive on positive reinforcement. "It provides a supportive umbrella over the children," Bucchino said. "And it's really no work whatsoever (only benefit) for the parent, the teacher or the community business."

Bucchino, who earned a master's degree in special and general education at Touro University, credits the successful empowerment-through-achievement theme to Grace, who was first diagnosed with Sanfilippo syndrome at age 4.

The syndrome involves an enzyme deficiency that hinders the body's ability to break down complex sugar molecules, impairing cognitive abilities. There's no cure for the degenerative disease, which can be difficult to diagnose – as was the case with Grace, who went undiagnosed for years despite apparent developmental delays.

"I'm not a business that started a cause, I'm a cause that started a business," she said. "I learned that I can move this cause ahead faster through commercial means, rather than just trying to raise money through fundraisers."

And that's just one of several lessons the altruistic entrepreneur has absorbed over the last decade.

"Children are our teachers, in many ways," Bucchino said. "We react like 'oh, my God, there's something wrong,' but we can flip that around and learn from what's going on with them.

"I learned how to change the behaviors of thousands of kids at a time, just by watching my little daughter, who couldn't even speak."