

More Than Cosplay: ‘Ghostbusters’ Fans Answer the Call to Do Good

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More Than Cosplay: ‘Ghostbusters’ Fans Answer the Call to Do Good

Inside the nationwide movement of superfans who are raising hundreds of thousands for charity every year — one proton pack at the time. Says filmmaker Jason Reitman of attending fundraisers: “We show up in the Ecto-1 and they light up.”



Firefighter Nick Vitucci, Reitman, Carrie Coon, Mckenna Grace and Dan Liberg of the Buffalo Ghostbusters. Bryan Bedder/Getty Images

When filmmaker Jason Reitman set out to make *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* in 2020, he ran into a problem: Many of the original props his dad, Ivan, had used to make the 1984 film — flight suits,

proton packs, even the iconic Ecto-1 — had deteriorated after decades in storage.

“We were doing this archaeological dig into, ‘OK, how do we still make a *Ghostbusters* film?’ ” recalls Reitman. “There were pieces that were no longer available.”

The solution came from an unlikely place. Over the years, *Ghostbusters* fan groups around the world had perfected the art of re-creating props for cosplay. The production ended up consulting some of these fans and adopting their DIY techniques to help restore the gear.

But Reitman soon discovered these groups were doing more than just playing dress-up.

“They were not simply cosplaying for Comic-Con but rather were doing this for charity,” he says.

“They were visiting children’s hospitals. They were raising money for good causes as Ghostbusters.”

Five years later, Reitman has joined their ranks. He now regularly suits up for charity events. In July, he visited four Los Angeles firehouses to honor first responders — especially poignant after January’s devastating wildfires in Altadena and Pacific Palisades.

“You have these real heroes on fire trucks, and then we show up in the Ecto-1 and they light up,” says Reitman. “And all you can think is, ‘Guys, you’re the ones doing the real work here.’ But it just shows there’s a way that movies light us up.”



Today, there are 204 *Ghostbusters* fan groups throughout the U.S., with more around the world. Collectively, they've raised about \$250,000 in the past year for causes ranging from children's hospitals to LGBTQ+ shelters, wildfire relief and cancer research.

Sony, which owns the franchise, has thrown its weight behind the movement. The studio pledged this year to match up to \$150,000 in funds raised by fan groups, and through Ghost Corps — the Sony-owned division run by Reitman and Dan Aykroyd — has donated toys and signed memorabilia for charity auctions. It even added a leaderboard to the official *Ghostbusters* website to rank which groups are raising the most money.

Among the volunteers Reitman has befriended is Matt Zunich, who co-founded L.A. Ghostbusters in 2021. His group works closely with the nonprofit Starlight Children's Foundation to raise money for *Ghostbusters*-themed hospital gowns for kids.

Dressed in full gear, they deliver the gowns in person. Zunich recalls visiting a 12-year-old *Ghostbusters* superfan at Miller Children's and Women's Hospital in Long Beach last year. As they were leaving, he saw the girl — now suited up in her new gown — holding a nurse's hand as she headed to her next appointment with a little spring in her step.

"She was more positive. She was more engaged. She was ready to take on the next challenge," Zunich says. "As someone who has been hospitalized as a kid, it sucks. And being able to give them the reprieve that I never had meant an awful lot to me."





Ghostbusters: Texas Rangers Division delivering Ghostbuster-themed Starlight Gowns to patients at Children's Medical Center in Dallas. Lizelle Mihnovets

As for Reitman, he says that at the end of the day, it's the costume that does the heavy lifting. Whether kids are seeing real stars like Bill Murray or McKenna Grace, or just someone from a fan club, the effect is the same.

"They feel like they're getting to meet a Ghostbuster," he says. That's what's exciting."

