

Wishes Do Grow on Trees For Needy Kids at Holidays

By WAYNE BAKER
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS - Walking into the council chambers at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building on Park Avenue last Thursday at 5 p.m., it looked like there was a problem.

Clothes and packages were strewn around the room. Trash bags poked their open necks above the backs of the benches. Clothes were piled on the desk at the front. Two women padded quietly amidst the apparent confusion, adding to a pile here, putting items into one of the bags there. A third woman walked in occasionally, did something, and left.

Every holiday season since September 11, 2001 it's been like this, as the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Welfare Department Wish Tree program does its work. The county provides a list of families on welfare and the towns add a few families who aren't on welfare but who don't have the means to provide their children with much for Christmas. Through the program, parents are then asked to submit their children's "wish lists" for Christmas.

The lists are transcribed onto paper ornaments. All are decorated with a gift request and many list the age, sex, and size of the child for which it is intended. This year, the ornaments decorated five trees. One was at the municipal building, another at the library in Scotch Plains. Another pair was at Fanwood Borough Hall and the Fanwood Memorial Library. The fifth tree was at the Goddard School in Branchburg.

The public is asked to select one or more ornaments, purchase the item(s) listed and bring it to the facility. The

Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA also has a gift program that feeds into the Wish Tree program. An area bicycle dealer donated eight bicycles this year. The donations are gathered regularly and carefully stacked in the Scotch Plains tax assessor's office.

Staging the gifts began December 20. They were moved out of the assessor's office, and those that were directed towards a specific family were piled together in the council chambers. Most families also receive a gift card or cards to assist with other needs. Last Thursday morning, several mothers from Evergreen School in Scotch Plains came in to assist. On Thursday evening, a member of each recipient family was slated to pick up the gifts.

Some gifts never make the piles for families. These overflow items are directed to the county, which uses them to help ensure a happy holiday for families in other communities.

Marie Davis, who works in the tax assessor's office, manages the Wish Tree program and was one of the women moving gifts around the council chambers last Thursday. The other was volunteer Janet Kaestner, while the woman walking in occasionally was Maria Santo, another worker in the assessor's office. Mrs. Davis also mentioned on extraordinary volunteer, Joan Donovan, who assisted every day.

The town's assessor, Michael Ross, said Mrs. Davis "puts so much time and effort into the program, it's unbelievable." Mrs. Davis noted, "I do it because it's needed."

The Wish Tree program brings joy to many families who otherwise wouldn't have much. It's proof that holiday wishes *do* grow on trees.



WINNING TEAM...The staff of the Redeemer Lutheran School in Westfield, pictured above, gather to celebrate the school having been awarded accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Earlier this year, Redeemer earned accreditation from the National Lutheran Schools Association.

Redeemer School Awarded Middle States Accreditation

WESTFIELD - The Middle States Commission on Elementary Schools has announced that Redeemer Lutheran School has been awarded accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

Dr. Patricia Kelly-Stiles, chairwoman of the commission and deputy superintendent of the Diocese of Brooklyn in New York, announced the award following the commission's November meeting.

Redeemer was one of approximately 40 schools so honored by the commission. MSCES works with public and private schools from New York State to the District of Columbia, in the United States Caribbean and in various locations around the globe.

This marks the second accreditation Redeemer has earned this past year. In August, the school was awarded accreditation from the National Lutheran Schools Association.

Accreditation signifies the educational community has engaged in a rigorous process of developing self-knowledge; has hosted an evaluation team of independently appointed educators and has created an ongoing Strategic Plan to move school improvement forward.

This process involved many elements of the Redeemer community, including faculty, staff, congregation members, parents and students.

Accreditation also signifies that Redeemer has met the MSCES and NLSA Standards for a quality school. These standards reflect current research and best practices from throughout the education profession. During the term of accreditation, the

school community will engage in a series of reports and/or site visits to maintain the vigor of the accreditation process.

The public is welcome to call to arrange for a tour of the school, which is beginning registration for Redeemer's 55th school year. Redeemer Lutheran School is located at 229 Cowperthwaite Place in Westfield.

St. Agnes Enhances School Music Program

AREA - Fifth-grade students at St. Agnes School in Clark recently received a special addition to the school's music program. Sister Claire Ouimet, principal of St. Agnes School, presented the students with individual "pre-corders" as part of the fifth-grade class' music theory program.

"The fifth graders have been working hard studying music theory, rhythms and notes, in anticipation of the instruments. With their understanding of this basic music theory, the fifth graders will be able to jump right in and begin to use their instruments immediately," said Mary Ellen Theel, St. Agnes School's music teacher.

"To date, the students have been working tirelessly on note values, and they can tap out a complicated rhythm," added Mrs. Theel. "It is truly amazing how much these students have learned about music thus far, and the 'pre-corders' will only help to further enhance their study."

For more information on St. Agnes School or the school's music program, please call (732) 381-0850 or access stagnesschool.com.

'Family Night' to Feature Fun For New Year's Eve

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Recreation Department and the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce will present a new community program entitled "Family Night" on Sunday, December 31, from 6 to 10 p.m. at the Westfield National Guard Armory on Rahway Avenue.

The purpose of the event is to provide a safe, fun environment for families to celebrate the new year. Family Night will feature activities geared towards families with children 15 years old and younger. The festivities will include popular, moonwalk-type climbers and slides; a disc jockey; various food and arts and crafts.

Pre-registration fees are \$10 for children (ages two to 17) and \$5 for adults (age 18 and older). Admission costs include unlimited rides and attractions. (A height of at least 32 inches is required for all rides).

"Top Hat" sponsors for this event include Century 21 Taylor and Love Inc., the Optimist Club of Westfield, Citibank, Fred Defazio of Creative

Sales, Policemen's Benevolent Association Local No. 90 and Jeff Brandes of Proutiff, LLC.

The Brick Oven of Westfield will provide food to purchase during the event. Abtrakadoodle will supply a variety of fun activities for children. Just Babies Daycare will offer a baby comfort station for infants and nursing mothers.

For more details, or to obtain a registration form, please call the Westfield Recreation Department at (908) 789-4080 or the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce at (908) 233-3021. To download a "Family Night" program registration form, please visit www.westfieldnj.gov/recreation.



James Feddeck

Zion Lutheran Church To Dedicate Organ

AREA - The Zion Lutheran Church, located at 559 Raritan Road in Clark, will dedicate its new Johannus Rembrandt 4 manual AGO Console Organ this Sunday, December 31. A Service of Praise will be held at 8 a.m. and again at 10:30 a.m.

Each service will feature a different mini-concert. All are welcome to attend either or both services. James Feddeck will be the guest organist. The Lutheran Women In Mission will provide a free breakfast between services.

Having studied piano, oboe and organ, Mr. Feddeck holds bachelor and master's degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in oboe and organ performance as well as conducting. He has received several honors, most recently the Grand Prize at the 2006 Vakhtang Jordania International Conducting Competition, and is a student at the University of Michigan. For more information about the organ dedication, please call Walt Miklas at (908) 754-4086.



Wayne Baker for The Westfield Leader and The Times
 WISHES COME TRUE...At the Scotch Plains Municipal Building last week, Marie Davis, center, and Janet Kaestner, right, organize the many gifts purchased by members of the community through the Wish Tree program. The program helps provide a merry Christmas for disadvantaged children.

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