

HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES

Gifts for the Children

"Presents! *Regalos!*" Two gleeful, giggling little girls shouted, jumping and dancing around the small livingroom. It was the Friday when school let out for Christmas vacation. Beth Palmer, tutoring director, and Rick Senne, former tutor and head of University Media Services at North Eastern Illinois University, drove up and down the streets, going to homes of 40 families of tutoring children, delivering gifts to be part of the families' Christmases.

The gifts were given by four suburban churches (Glenview UMC, Kingswood UMC in Buffalo Grove, Trinity Church of the North Shore, and Grace UMC in Naperville) as well as a tutor and a mother of a tutoring child. Altogether 174 tutoring children, 14 tutoring parents, and 84 children from Goudy Elementary School received Christmas gifts through the generosity of these people.

The day before the delivery, when all the gifts were laid out in geographical order in the tutoring center, a mother who had moved out of the area came to pick up her children's gifts. When she saw the beautifully wrapped packages all together, it took her breath away. She exclaimed, "What a blessing! What a blessing!"

Delivering the gifts was no easy matter. Rick, looking like Santa Claus as he carried one or two huge plastic bags full of presents to bring to the children, sometimes could hardly get through the doorways. The doors were not always easy to get to, either. Some of the apartments had no doorbells. At one building Rick and Beth waved their hands in front of a big window, hoping someone would trust them enough to let them in. At two buildings, mothers walked up just as Rick and Beth were about to turn around and go to the next family. At one building they couldn't find the doorbell in the dark entrance. All of a sudden a young lad appeared and asked who they were looking for. They told him, and he said, "Are you Beth?" Beth said, "Why, how did you know?" He said, "I see you at Goudy School when you talk with the children. Here's the doorbell." He pointed to the side of the door frame, then he left as quickly as he had come, riding off on his

bicycle, a true Christmas elf. All the 40 families except one, who was not home, received their gifts that night. Presents for several families who had moved out of the area but still participated in the Tutoring Program were put on "will call" to be picked up by the families the next day.

Jewel Gift Certificates

As well as gifts for the children, each family was given a Jewel gift certificate of \$15-\$30 for food for the holidays. The Indian Hill Garden Club of Wilmette, under the leadership of Sharon Weingarten, raised \$1390 to give Jewel gift certificates to the families of the Tutoring Program. As Beth and Rick presented the certificates, usually to the parents, they carefully explained in Spanish or English what they were so they would not get misplaced.

One small apartment was quite warm, and they noticed the oven door was open. In another apartment everyone had on winter jackets. When they asked why that was, a girl said, "We were about to do the laundry." As they stood in the apartment they realized how cold it was in there.

The children were happy about the gifts; the parents were extremely grateful for the gift certificates. One mother said, "We'll really need this. We didn't know what we were going to do in the next week – you know, for Christmas." A woman who was with one of the mothers said to her friend, "God is so good to you, it makes me want to cry. God is so good to you, it makes me want to cry." Another mother said, "You all have been so good to us. You've give us so many good things." When we gave the gift certificate to a father, he said he had just gone to the store to get some soup for his son who was sick, but it was too expensive, so he went to another store. He was grateful for the gift certificate. He said, "You have been so good to us." Another mother said, "Thank you, thank you. It brings tears to my eyes," and she hugged us.

THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE

"No one should deny children the privilege of

servicing," said Cornel West, Harvard professor of theology and noted African-American author. The children of the Tutoring Program have had many occasions to serve this holiday season.

Letters to Residents of the Methodist Home

At least 60 students of the Tutoring Program wrote letters of holiday greetings to residents of the Methodist Home. They also made greeting cards during Saturday tutoring. Some of the children had never written a letter before. Others didn't want to write the letters, so the tutors had explain how important it was to the seniors. Amy Gleisner said she visits a senior once a week. "They love the letters they get. They put them up on their walls," she told her tutee. Marcus D. (6th gr.) didn't want to write a letter at first, but then he wrote a letter, he typed a message on the computer, and he made a card for a woman. She wrote him back and told him how much she enjoyed his letter.

Stuffed Animals for Children at Goudy School

Enid Young, a woman in Iowa, sent us 10 large boxes of reconditioned stuffed animals to give to children at Goudy School. During the two weeks after Thanksgiving, at least 16 children and three mothers from the tutoring program wrapped the gifts, some working for 4 hours at a time. By the time they were wrapped, the presents took 19 boxes, which were delivered to Goudy School on the Friday before Christmas vacation.

Shelter Party

Eight children from the Tutoring Program along with 23 adults helped serve the Christmas dinner for men of Epworth's Warming Center. The over-night shelter in Epworth's gym houses 65 men each night. 51 men came to the dinner and were treated to a large meal, new clothes (seconds from Wal-Marts in Indiana), and winter coats. The entire gathering enjoyed singing carols.

Singing for Bethany Terrace

Twenty-two children went to Morton Grove to sing at the Bethany Terrace Nursing Home for "Little Christmas." The children looked beautiful in their robes: white for the smaller children and blue-gray with gold stoles for the older youth. The choir sang five Christmas songs and two carols with all the people. Stephanie N., Johnesha and Shonesha J., Glenda W., and Shanese W. sang solos. Joseph M., Judy M., and Monique S. accompanied pieces on the piano. Judy M. played

the flute. Rotimi O. played the trombone. At the end of the "Little Christmas" the children shook hands with the seniors. Each child was given a \$5 McDonalds gift certificate and a bag of goodies with small gifts from the daughter of one of the residents. It was a beautiful day.

PARENTS HELP IN PROGRAM

Parents of many students support the program in many ways. Rosetta Pillow began by watching students practice the keyboards during the Music Institute two summers ago and encouraging them to keep trying. Last year she tutored in the afternoon program. This year she is tutoring two afternoons a week. Chastity Benson, when given a choice as to whether her son would receive a Christmas present through the tutoring program, decided she would give his slot to another child who was needier, and that she would sponsor another child in the program. Annette Steele has chaperoned on numerous trips taken by the members of the Community Youth Choir and the Music Institute. Veronica Rodriguez donated many stuffed animals to be given to preschool children at the local school the day before Christmas vacation. Veronica Rodriguez, Imelda Soto, and Devon Tripp helped wrap Christmas presents for 3-4 hours which the Tutoring Program (Enid Young) gave children at the local school. Wanda Robinson won a small amount of money in the lottery and out of it she gave a donation to the tutoring program as thanks for helping her grandchildren. Pat Charles is the liaison for the Edgewater Warming Center housed in the gym at Epworth Church. One mother gave a spare set of car keys to the tutoring staff in case they needed to use her car for a field trip. Last spring Celeste Taylor fried 100 pieces of chicken for the 5th-8th graders' Parents' Night; she didn't want any children to go hungry. Norma Jones has driven children on several tutoring and Girl Scout field trips. Neesy Watts has chaperoned on many Girl Scout trips. Many parents have helped set up, serve, and clean up for the Parents Nights of the tutoring program. These are just some of the ways parents have helped in the tutoring program this year.

SAGA OF THE BOILER

We've come to regard moderate temperatures as a basic human right. Sat., Nov. 30, at 5 pm, the boiler that heats Epworth's sanctuary and the main tutoring rooms in the basement died. It took a few days to analyze the problem to find out that

the boiler was irreparably unrepairable, cracked, kaput, dead. The temperature in the basement went to 52°, then 48°, then 42°. We couldn't have Monday night tutoring in the basement, so five students studied in the Wesley House, and 25 students and their tutors were all on the first floor. Luckily, the year before we had installed brighter lights and sound-absorbent tiles in the parlor, which made it quite pleasant. Students who wanted to use the computers, however, had to wear their gloves. We did the same thing for afternoon tutoring on Tuesday and Wednesday. On Saturday, 57 students, K-7th gr., and 60 8th grade tutors from Wilmette Junior High School, were all on the first floor. We had been expecting chaos, but after 15 minutes of organizing, the students settled down to study. In fact, when it came time for the age-group time at the end of the session, the students wanted to keep reading, writing, and doing arithmetic. That was a first! They were really working!

The next week there was still no heat. On Monday night, Dec. 9, the 5th-8th graders were in the first floor parlor just getting ready to study, and all of a sudden there was a flood. Water gushed from the gym/shelter overhead, running into Epworth's chapel and flooding the parlor. Tutors asked what they could do. Beth Palmer exclaimed, "Get some buckets!" Then she moaned, "Everything technological around here is broken! The boiler is broken, the basement door is broken, the basement doorbell is broken. Now there is a flood. Everything is broken ... except the children! They're not broken." One of the children looked around and added, "And the tutors. They're not broken."

We found out that the main boiler could not be fixed. We'd have to get a new one. Epworth decided that since all three boilers were 18 years old (the others are for the first floor and for Epworth's chapel and the second floor office), and since the life-time of boilers was 15-20 years, the best course would be to replace all three boilers, for \$24,000. The boiler company would begin replacing the boilers as soon as they had a 40% down-payment in hand.

On Sunday Dec. 15th three people from Trinity Church of the North Shore came to bring Christmas gifts to seven families of the Tutoring Program. During the worship service they stored the presents in the main tutoring room in the basement. They felt how bone-chilling the cold was in the basement, almost colder than it was outside. During the worship service one of the

members, Jane Holmes, a former tutor, told about the need for funds for the new boiler. Jane showed the check she was giving for the boiler and said that this year she wasn't going to be going to California to visit her family, so she could give money for the boiler.

One of the women from Trinity, Betsy Banks, was deeply impressed by the people at Epworth. Her daughter had tutored as an 8th grader two years before. Her son was tutoring as an 8th grader this year. She saw how much her children enjoyed being part of the program and how it benefitted the neighborhood children. She wanted to help raise money to get a new boiler for Epworth and the Tutoring Program. She went home that afternoon and drafted a letter to be sent to the parents of all the students from Wilmette Junior High who had tutored in the program in the last eight years. She called the two teacher currently in charge of the 8th grade tutors at WJHS. She called Jack Jacobson, the teacher formerly in charge. Then she set a personal goal to call friends whose children had tutored in the program in order to raise \$1000 by the end of the week. By Thursday she had raised \$1350. The following Monday she brought in checks totaling \$1400. Thank you, Betsy.

With money that had been raised at Epworth that week, a 40% down-payment was made on Thurs., Dec. 19, and installation of the big boiler was finished on Fri., Dec. 20. We have heat! (Now we have to pay for it.)

COMMENT FROM A PARTICIPANT

Email, November 11, 2002

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate of Wilmette Junior High School. Last year, I participated in the Epworth Tutoring Program. It was the best experience of my life. I have made so many friends through the program. I am interested in possibly tutoring this year. ... If you contact me with information, my friends and I will gladly tutor the children on Saturdays. Thank you for your help. – Kelsi Kennedy.

GLIMPSES OF STUDENTS -- BOYS

This year the Tutoring Program has a lot of boys. Among the 5th-8th graders on Monday evenings, 16 out of 35 students are boys. In the afternoon program, 1st-4th graders, almost 2/3 are boys, 21 out of 34 students. It's important to work hard with boys and help them develop basic academic skills early. Here is what's happening with some of the students.

Enrique (1st gr.) came from Texas last

summer to live with his aunt. He enrolled in our program, and we found he had the skills of a preschooler. His tutor, Bev Shneider, is teaching him to count, to draw letters and numbers, and teaching him English. He will move back to Texas in Jan., but he is getting a start in his education.

Kenneth (now 2nd gr.) could not read in December 2001. He did not know the sounds of the letters, and he had a very short attention span. Just before Christmas vacation last year we gave his mother some phonics worksheets for him to practice with. This year, a year later, he can read, he has learned to concentrate, and he can do homework on his own.

Andre (3rd gr.) could not read at the end of 1st grade. Our Summer Music Institute unlocked the idea of "reading" for him, and last year as a 2nd grader he began to read the easiest 1st grade books. To our surprise, this year he can suddenly read books almost on his level. He can do worksheets based on the books. In math he is still struggling with how to figure out basic + and - facts, but recently, instead of "making the sticks," he figured out on his own how to use the number line in his folder. Andre keeps going beyond what we think he is able to do. He keeps surprising us.

At the beginning of the year Johnny (4th gr.) was one of two students in his class at school who did no homework. He also found it hard to concentrate in our program. By the middle of November he was doing more and more homework. For our magazine *Sunshine* he wrote a long story about John Henry, over a full page. The next day, with the help of his tutor, he corrected the story for spelling and punctuation. Few of our students have the patience for that. He was motivated! We asked his teacher at school if Johnny were doing a little better. She said, "No! He's doing a *lot* better!"

At the beginning of the year Ramiro (4th gr.) always said he had "No homework." By the beginning of November he was taking out his homework and doing more and more. He was also reading the picture books in our library and doing the reflection worksheets about the books.

Javier, another 4th grader, never had any homework when our program began at the end of September. His behavior was worrisome. Now he brings his homework and does it well.

Last year we began to teach Martin (then 3rd gr.) to read, both English and Spanish, and to do simple arithmetic. Now in 4th grade, Martin has caught up with his class in math, and he can actually read beginning-beginning books, although

fourth grade academic work is still out of his reach, except for math.

Marcus (6th gr.) is still getting used to our program. At the beginning of the year he didn't want to be there and didn't want to do any work. With patience from his tutors and his family, he does a little more work every week. One Monday in December he read a story, did worksheets for two stories, and did a math worksheet.

Kyara (7th gr.) was considered the class clown. His tutor, Mark Materna, has taken him in hand. To motivate Kyara to read, Mark bought him a book of raps by Tupak Shakur. Mark found sites on the Internet with grammar and math exercises. He went on an outing in November with Kyara and his older brother Royale. At least in our program, Kyara is no longer a class clown.

Augusta (8th gr.) has been in our program since 1st grade. He always did less than we knew he could. For the last couple of years he has wanted to go to Lane H.S., from which his sister Solanna graduated in June 2002. This fall he applied to Lane, and he knew he had to do extra work in math to pass the entrance exam. He asked his tutor Clay Edwards (Tutoring Assistant) to help him with extra work during the week. Augusta said he wanted to study four hours a day on math in order to be prepared. So far, he is working hard.

UPDATE ON FORMER STUDENTS

LaMonica White was in our program 1993-1999. She has a daughter 5 mo. old. LaMonica will be going back to NorthEastern Illinois University in January to resume her studies.

Solanna Bullette is a student at Chicago State University, majoring in Special Education. She also has a job with the Park District.

TROUBLES IN PARADISE (*subject line of a tutor's email*)

This fall we've had to strategize to get things in control in order to have a good learning environment. We share this so people will know we are not dealing all "goody-goody" children who learned self-control at home. These kids are not the roughest of the rough (they don't come to our program), but they need strong structures in which they can work peacefully and be motivated to learn. Some people ask why the students come. We feel that regardless of why they come (parents, friends, inner motivation), if they come, we have a chance to influence them and provide

an intervention.

There are a lot of students in the program this year. The enrollment for the afternoon program (1st-4th graders) is up over 50% from last year. We continue to try to find more tutors to help the students during the 3-5 pm study time. The hardest time for us has been 2:35 to 3 pm, when the students get out of school and before our program officially starts. The students can play board games or do jig-saw puzzles, but how to handle all those children?! All of a sudden we thought of the computer lab! The students love the computer. Each day we give 1/3 of the students the option of going to the computer lab to "play" on the computer! It is wonderful!

This year there was a large group of new 9th graders who were eligible for the high school Epworth Teen Study Group. The second week of tutoring, things were totally out of control. Students were turning lights on and off. A student rode his bike down the hallway. Students hung from the basement pipes. Students sassed the tutors. The evening's refreshments, cocoa, students threw at the outside door of the Tutoring Center. It was not a good scene.

Last year one or two mature 8th graders who bring homework from school to work on were allowed to be part of the HS study group, so when one or two students asked this year, it was OK. We found out that the second week of the program 8 out of 14 of the students were 6th, 7th, and 8th graders, who had come with no work to do. This was a serious situation. We had to strategize as to what to do to make the program viable.

We decided to (1) limit the Study Group to students actually in high school, (2) talk with each student, (3) visit or call the parents of the students involved, (4) call the police if things got out of hand again. Students were talked with and parents were visited or called.

The next week, despite telling the 6th-8th graders and their parents that the students could not come, they came again. The structure could not handle them. The students were not allowed to come in. They continued to roam the neighborhood in a band of around 10 kids. They rang the doorbell and ran. They threw stones at the windows. We called 311 and asked for a police patrol. We began to call parents of students we had seen and the students we thought were running around to ask them where their children were and to suggest they come to get their children from the neighborhood rather than have them arrested by the police. One father came and

was very disturbed.

The next week the students were very sober and quality studying took place, but we are still working to come to an agreement of what the high school program is about.

It is obvious there is a need for more programs for youth in the area, especially for friendship groups. We are open for new leadership to develop new programs for youth.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Halloween The children of the afternoon program had a good time the day before Halloween. Four tutors did imaginative face painting: Amy Bouschard, Leona Lee, Nada Manley, and Amy's friend Holly. The children became witches, goblins, football players, spidermen, cats, and clowns. It was a delightful time.

Parents' Night The 5th-8th graders' Parents Night in November was a celebration of families, youth, education, and community. Around 88 people came, including parents from 18 families, students, brothers and sisters, tutors and friends. There was enough food for everyone to feast well. After dinner, the Community Youth Choir sang three songs, with the audience joining in on "The Greatest Love of All," ("I believe the children are the future"). The speaker for the evening, Gearldine Williams, represented Scrap Mettle Soul, a local drama troupe. She gave a skit from their current show "The Whole World Gets Well" and encouraged the students to do their best in school. Scrap Mettle Soul goes to the UK in Jan.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Turkeys For several years the eighth grade tutors from Wilmette Jr. High have had bake sales and candy sales at their school to raise money to give each family in the Saturday Tutoring Program a turkey on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. The children are grateful, but particularly the parents are appreciative. This year as early as October parents and students asked about the turkeys. They wanted to know if we were giving turkeys this year. One mother asked if there were extra turkeys; she wanted to have a second turkey and keep it frozen for Christmas. The turkeys are very important to the families.

This year 42 families received turkeys. The families thank the 8th grade tutors for raising

the money to give them turkeys.

CROP Walkathon Twenty youth from the Tutoring Program along with eight adults took the el to UIC in mid-October to participate in the Chicago CROP Walkathon, to raise money to alleviate hunger. Altogether we raised over \$1800 for the cause, with John Sansone being the highest money raiser. All 28 people from Epworth walked the 10-kilometer course, with Johnny Nichols finishing last because of his shoes. Everyone enjoyed seeing the near West side. It was a sunny, chilly day and a good experience.

OTHER NEWS

Writing The 5th-8th graders were given pictures of children from other parts of the world and asked to write a fiction story about them. 36 5th - 8th grade students wrote stories and typed them for the fall "Epworth Stories." 39 1st-4th grade students wrote stories on topics of their choice for the Fall issue of "Sunshine."

Computer Lab We finally got a DSL line which allows six computers to be on the Internet at once. More and more students use the computer lab to complete their school projects, particular for science, social studies, and various reports.

The students love to use the Internet, but there have been occasional glitches which Pat Zukosky, our computer guru, has fixed. Computers have died, and we have had to find replacements. Recently Pat downloaded software that blocks 35,000 sex web sites. We appreciate Pat's expertise and dedication.

Springboard Foundation We thank the Springboard Foundation, a donors fund within the Chicago Community Trust, for selecting the Epworth Tutoring Program to sponsor. Many lives are enriched and changed through their generosity.

COMMENTS FROM A PARTICIPANT

Marshun Marshall was in the Tutoring Program as a high school student in the mid-1990's. This is a write-up of a conversation with him in November 2002:

"My tutor Ann and her husband took me out to eat at the Salt and Pepper Diner. Now I go to the Salt and Pepper Diner frequently, and I still think about Ann and her husband, almost every day. They also took me to a Walter Payton family

reunion.

"I was in the Tutoring Program at a time in my life when I was discovering who I was. The program was very important for me. This is a program for people who want something better in life. You find out there are people who care. I hope your program lasts for a long, long time.

"My fiancée and I would like to get married, hopefully in January. We have a 2-year old son. I enjoy my son. I enjoy being with him. It's not baby-sitting. Am I a good father? That's hard to say because I don't think of it like that. I enjoy being with my son and I can't understand those people who disregard their children.

"Please pray for my brother and sister. I'm trying to get my family involved in church. I read the Bible on my own because there is more time for reading longer passages and thinking about what I read.

"I've had my own apartment since July! Hurray! Right now we're moving to another apartment. I'm looking forward to it. I'm working at UPS, and also trying to get my GED. It's difficult because algebra is really hard.

"I am so grateful for your program."