



Daily Times Herald photo by Larry Devine

Books collected in the Holly Jolly Reading drive will be given to New Opportunities, which will make them available to client families for Christmas gifts to children. Books can be dropped off at Kuemper Catholic High School, Kuemper Catholic Middle Schools (St. Lawrence Center) or Des Moines Area Community College Carroll campus. Katie Kustra, a Kuemper 2012 graduate now attending the University of Northern Iowa, began the annual book-collection campaign. Students who have contributed to the donations at Kuemper Middle School are (from left) seventh-grader Erica Tigges, seventh-grader Jacob Schreck, eighth-grader Ashey Wenck and sixth-grader Olivia Klein. Katie Kustra's mom, Luanne Kustra (right), is organizing this year's drive.

## Holly Jolly Reading welcomes books for kids

The holiday season also has been a busy time for Katie and Luanne Kustra, as they've collected new and used children's books in their Holly Jolly Reading campaign.

The Kustras are requesting donation of books appropriate for youths through 18 years old.

The books are then made available to families served by New Opportunities.

This year the Kustras have a goal of 600 books, and donation boxes are located at Kuemper Catholic High School, Kuemper Middle School (St. Lawrence Center) and Des Moines Area Community College. Donations also can be arranged by contacting Luanne Kustra at 790-5244.

New Opportunities Family Development Center coordinator Shawna Leonard says the books have been very popular with families. New

Opportunities makes the books available to families during distribution of gifts in the Giving Tree program. The Giving Tree served over 300 families last year.

At that time parents can browse through books and select ones they'd like to give to their children.

"It's really an easy way to give kids the gift of reading," Leonard says. "It's very important. We love to see the popularity of it."

Books that are left over are made available during the rest of the year at the Family Development Center where they're free for client families.

Luanne Kustra continues to deliver books to New Opportunities during the year, as donations are received at other times besides Christmas. For instance, she's received books from garage

sales.

"It's pretty awesome. Children love to receive books," Leonard says.

She relates that some students from the Head Start program located in the same building as the Family Development Center "love to come over after class and look through the books."

Katie Kustra initiated Holly Jolly Reading six years ago, when she was a seventh-grader, to make sure kids had books to read during holiday vacation from school.

In recognition of her volunteerism with Holly Jolly Reading, Stuff the Bus, and school and church activities, Katie this year received a President's Volunteer Service Award from the Corporation for National and Community Service accompanied with a letter from President Obama.

The letter thanked Katie

"for helping to address the most pressing needs in your community and our country."

Obama also noted that he's urged "a new era of responsibility — a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world. These are duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit than giving our all to a difficult task. Your volunteer service demonstrates the kind of commitment to your community that moves America a step closer to its great promise."

Katie is a freshman business student at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls where she's volunteered in school and church projects.