

IN THE NICK OF TIME



SPECIAL TO THE TIMES HERALD

Carroll High School girls basketball players sort gifts to New Opportunities' Angel Tree program, serving infants through 14-year-olds in Carroll County households.

Kids' Christmas gift wishes fulfilled

By **LARRY DEVINE**
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First, Lynda Franey tossed and turned and couldn't sleep.

A few weeks ago, she and husband Mike went to Bomgaars to each select a card for a child to shop for in New Opportunities' Angel Tree program. Lynda bought gifts for a 2-year-old girl, and Mike a 10-year-old boy.

Lynda's stressful night was caused, however, by seeing there were so many other children's cards that hadn't been selected and the program's deadline

was nearing.

"Every one of those cards represented a child to me, and there were so many there. It just blew me away," Franey said. "We did our shopping, but honestly I couldn't sleep about it. It was just in my mind all night long. The next morning, it just felt like a heart nudge. I had to do something."

She jumped into action, returning to Bomgaars that afternoon.

"I went back in there to check out the cards, and I decided to go live on Facebook — you know that dang social media and the impact it can have," she recounted. "I didn't know what I was going to say for sure, but I just let my heart do the talking."

Her plea to help make Christmas wishes come true for boys and girls living in financially struggling house-

holds struck a chord with people far and wide.

"A movement can start with just one person," Franey said. "It takes just one person to say something. I think sometimes people just need that nudge, and that sure was the case, because within a few minutes I had people Venmoing me, reaching out, wanting to give money. I said, 'I'll do the shopping. If you want to give, I'll shop.'"

"By the end of the time I'd done that live, I had several hundred dollars already, so I took 10 more names off the wall."

Support continued to pour in from people in the community and even from people who had no local con-

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Carroll High School girls basketball team helped sort and load presents donated to New Opportunities' Angel Tree program, serving children in Carroll County households. Pictured are (front, from left) Kennedy Thein, Ella Collison, Hannah Jorgensen, Kelsie Reicks, Shay Sinnard, Madison Tunning, Ali Kock, (back, from left) Head Coach Katie Kock, Laura Sweeney, Addison Klocke, Kennedy Lein, Camryn Schable, Ava Gross, Shayne Aschinger, Gabi Hammer and Coach Marc Renning.

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nection.

Some people came out to shop for kids, and others sent donations, which ultimately totaled nearly \$3,600.

"Never in a million years did I think," Franey said of that response, adding, "It is such a giving community. You put out the word, and people are right there."

By the end of the next night, all the cards has been taken, she said.

"I felt a true joy of what happened. It just filled my heart; I was so excited. We can make a difference. One person can do so little, but together we can do so much.

"... I received donations anywhere from \$5 to \$250 a person. Every dollar of it matters. It doesn't matter what you can give; it matters that together we can do it better."

It happened in the nick of time.

"We had a short time to get 200 kids adopted for Christmas," said RoAnn Kofron, Family Development Center coordinator for New Opportunities, which each year posts kids' gift-request cards at Bomgaars and her office.

"Everyone shared on Facebook and word of mouth, and it just kind of blew up, and we were able to have a bunch of organizations inside and outside Carroll County, and even outside the state, who contributed to help get the funds for our children," she added.

Individuals, community groups and businesses all stepped up.

That success enabled New Opportunities to distribute gifts to Carroll County families on Thursday, Dec. 10, for 306 kids from infants through 14-year-olds.

"It was kind of crazy at times. I was worried," Kofron related. "But then the next thing you know, it all worked out."

Volunteers, including

members of Carroll High School's boys and girls basketball teams, sorted the gifts: toys, board games, clothes, hats, mittens, bath and body products, and more. This year particularly saw an extraordinary number of bikes, trikes and scooters, Kofron said.

For Franey, community service and making a difference, especially at Christmas time, is nothing new.

She's served on the United Way, Family Resource Center and Carroll Chamber of Commerce boards of directors. In those positions, she'd worked with New Opportunities and is friends with a number of the agency's staff members.

Formerly working 18 years as local sales manager for Carroll Broadcasting radio stations, where she's still a consultant, she helped launch their annual Kids' Christmas Wish campaign, which also assists New Opportunities.

"That's very near and

dear to my heart," she said of Kids' Christmas Wish. "I've always had a soft spot for Christmas and for the kids."

These days, Franey is a brand ambassador for Yoli health and wellness products company. She's also a licensed realtor and works part time at Mid-Iowa Insurance and Real Estate, where husband Mike is a co-owner and broker.

Not only did New Opportunities benefited from her Facebook campaign, but it was so successful that she was able to reach out to more in need through Family Resource Center, a church, a nursing home and other contacts.

"It was very much a wonder in my eyes that it did what it did," she said. "I couldn't have been more ecstatic that people felt it in their hearts to do what they did, and I was happy to go out and help make it happen. ... I just felt like little Mrs. Claus filling the stockings, and I loved every minute of it."