

From the Publisher

Bringing a ray of sunshine

I am yielding some of my space this week to our friend and former mayor Patrice Douglas. Her family started a charity to help children in Edmond many years ago and I wanted her to write about it this holiday. Instead of having you read about all the things I am thankful for and there are many, I wanted you to know about some good folks in action showing their gratitude in life by helping others.



Hibbard

“On Friday and Saturday, Edmond’s homegrown philanthropy, UR Special, had hundreds of volunteers smiling and helping some of our most at-risk children. These beautiful kiddos – 196 boys and 201 girls – all got to “shop” for brand new jeans, shoes, shirts, socks, undies and importantly, a warm coat and hat. I was there, firsthand, witnessing all the giggles and sweet smiles. I had the privilege of working at the girls’ jeans station and helped so many little girls pick the “perfect” pair of jeans.

Since 1993, UR Special has not been the most visible organization in Edmond, but it certainly serves one of the most critical needs here. It started with a simple idea and three tenacious women. Donna Watson, a long-time Edmond citizen, went to Africa on a mission and saw the bright smiles when little girls were given new dresses. She came back and enlisted two other women, Claudette Dills and Linda King, also from Edmond, to help her. Together they had the vision that every child should be excited to start school with a new set of clothes that helped them feel special.

I know this story intimately because my mom was Claudette Dills. She became the first seamstress to make dresses, and the de facto unpaid executive director. Local churches, especially the Edmond Church of Christ, donated money and hours to this mission. Money was hard to find, but kids kept flocking in – needing a new set of clothes just to make it through winter. In 1993, they clothed about forty kids. And now UR Special clothes four hundred children.

Many times, I received calls from mom, asking me to raise \$500 for new coats because more children than expected were signing up to “shop.” But then came Edmond’s Women Club. Those amazing women raised money, donated clothing, brought herds of volunteers, and became board members. With community contributions and awareness, other Edmond churches joined in filling the shelves with brand new clothing. Mayor Sandra Naifeh was so impressed that she nominated UR Special for a national award as the best homegrown charity organization. Out of hundreds, UR Special was chosen as one of the top three nationally. Sandra was also a tiger when it came to getting them a building to allow kids to have their “shopping trips” three times a year.

The uniqueness of UR Special is its extraordinary willingness to accept help from all the diverse groups of Edmond’s citizens. Many are seamstresses that painstakingly create some of the most beautiful dresses I have ever seen. Some crochet bean-

ies to keep little ears warm. Senior living centers have been involved helping with some little extras, like small quilts and slippers for little toes. High school classes have pitched in as volunteers. Edmond merchants have helped keep costs low by giving deep discounts on new clothing.

Recently, we faced a serious challenge when the building we had used for fifteen years was “repurposed” for a different organization. But with the legacy of 30 years, and more than 50,000 Edmond children served, we knew we could overcome this obstacle. With the help of Edmond Public Schools, we now have a space where kids can feel safe and loved and can show up three times a year – back-to-school, winter, and spring – for a new set of clothes.

Last spring, sweet little 8-year-old Amy showed us all the effort was worth it. She came in, pointed straight to a beautiful dress on display, and said, That is it. That one is mine! All the volunteer hours, all the seamstresses, all the paperwork, all the fundraising – every bit of it is worth it because every child should remember “you are special.” When I saw Amy on Friday, I told her I remembered her and that beautiful dress. She grinned and said, “I still have it on a special hanger in my closet – it’s the best.”

My mom would be so proud of this community and would be ecstatic that every at-risk child in Edmond has a chance to feel special. She would be so happy that Amy cherishes that dress with a special hanger.”

A special Santa

Edmond holds many opportunities to see Santa Claus. I hope you take advantage of them all. However, there is a Santa project that is near and dear to my heart. I was a member of this club for 12 years. Many of the members are from Edmond and they have been showing their gratitude in life by giving back to this project even though it is just outside Edmond city limits.

The Northwest Oklahoma City Rotary Club’s Annual Santa Project makes a difference in people’s lives, especially the lives of the youth and children. The annual Northwest Oklahoma City Rotary Club Santa Project is a “historic project”, having been conducted for over 40 years, and is the only “not for profit” Santa Project in the Metro Area, with all its profits going to fund charities, the vast majority focused on children and youth. The success of the project is largely due to the generous support of community leaders and businesses who are willing to partner with the club and “sponsor” one of the many important facets of the project. In past years they were able to raise, and in return, distribute grants to various organizations. To follow are some of the people and organizations in which we have been able to help make a difference.

Hearing Impaired & Special Needs Children

They annually serve as hosts and hold a day dedicated to hearing impaired children and a day dedicated to the special needs of children, where they can come, visit Santa, have their picture taken, and enjoy a wonderful experience. Those days are December 11th and 16th respectively.

The Messages Project

Children are silent victims of their



Volunteers gather to help Edmond’s homegrown organization, UR Special. The charity started in the 1990’s and continues to serve over 400 children today.

parents’ crime. However, when a child’s parent is incarcerated, and a healthy connection is maintained, the child is less likely to experience social, emotional, and educational problems. For incarcerated parents, a healthy family connection reduces the likelihood they will commit a crime after leaving prison. The Messages Project helps establish and maintain the bond between children and their incarcerated parents through video messages and other interactive media. Their volunteers have recorded over 19,000 video messages with incarcerated parents from correctional institutions across the United States and abroad. www.themessagesproject.org

Infant Crisis Center

Infant Crisis Services provides life-sustaining formula, food, and diapers to babies in toddlers in times of crisis. Infant Crisis Services employees and volunteers provide education, emotional support, and guidance to the families we are privileged to serve. Everyone is treated with respect, kindness, compassion and love. Infant Crisis Services is also a link to connect families with other helping agencies in addition to programs leading to self-sufficiency. As responsible stewards, they are loyal to their mission while serving the tiniest of the poor and hungry. Since their inception in 1984, they have provided food, diapers, clothing and hope for more than 300,000 babies and toddlers. www.infantcrisis.org

Citizens Caring for Children

Citizens Caring for Children serves the needs of Oklahoma children living in foster care, the most vulnerable children in the state, by providing clothing, personal hygiene items, resources and continued support focused on education to build a

brighter tomorrow. For more than 30 years, Citizens Caring for Children has provided for children living in foster care by providing hope, changing lives and creating healthy futures by providing resources and necessities. Citizens Caring for Children meets the needs of more than 1,800 Oklahoma children in foster care each year through services and programs like the Resource Center, Back2School and Joy4Kids. www.cccokc.org

K-Club

Keaton’s Kindness Foundation works to spread kindness around the world through random acts of kindness with a special emphasis on bringing joy and kindness to pediatric cancer patients and their families. The K Club hosts monthly Lego parties at Oklahoma Children’s Hospital and the OK Kids Korral, assists with funeral costs for children who have passed away from cancer, provides gifts and treats for children celebrating birthdays, milestones, or who just need some extra encouragement, raises funds for local pediatric research and education, and has donated over \$205,000 to the Children’s Health Foundation since 2019. www.kclubkindness.org

For more information about the Northwest Oklahoma City Rotary Club’s Santa Project, the difference it makes in people’s lives, and how you can help, please contact rotarynwokc@gmail.com or contact Rotary Club Member Daylene Bachman at 405-216-3059.

From the entire Edmond Life & Leisure family to yours, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

(Ray Hibbard, publisher of Edmond Life & Leisure , may be reached for comment at ray@edmondpaper.com)

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