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Volunteers aid BARN with time and money

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Anna Rafferty of Gainesville used a common-sense pitch when she decided to ask her neighbors to help out the transitional house BARN: women helping women.

She wanted to start a collection drive of some sort to help out the abused mothers temporarily living at the Bristow safe home. Some of her friends volunteered and donated to BARN before, so it seemed like a legitimate place for her to lend out a helping hand.

Rafferty told the 40 or so women from her Virginia Oaks neighborhood to bring useful items they could donate as presents when they came to her house for their annual pre-Christmas party.

It was "kind of appropriate to do a charity like this," said Rafferty.

The next thing she knew, there were more than 100 items ranging from boxes of diapers to a \$50 check. In fact, her neighbors were so generous, that she had to fold down the back row of seats in her husband's SUV just to fit all the items in the vehicle.



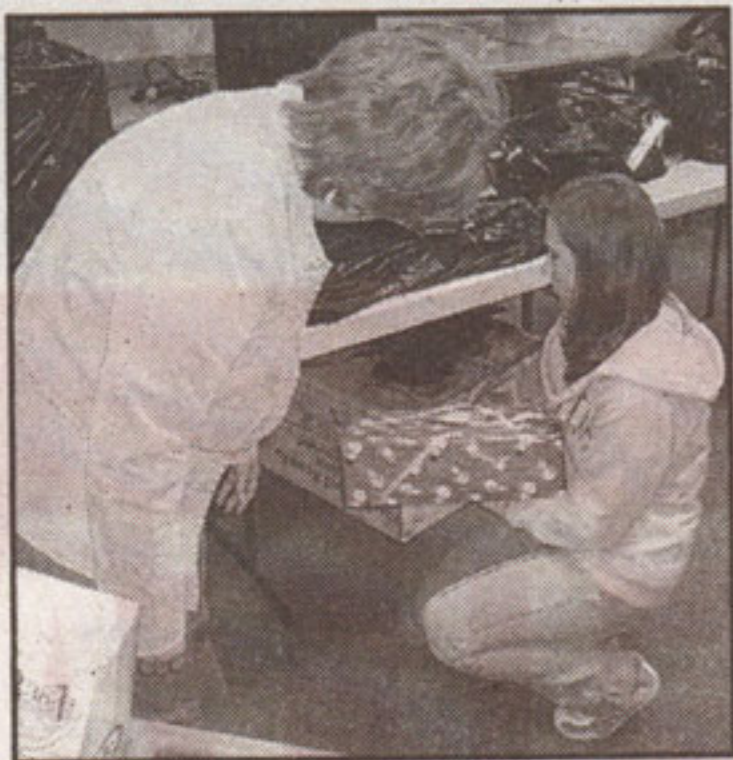
Times Staff Photo/Dan Roem

HERE TO HELP: Debbie Page-Naples, left, reaches past Kelly Willett, center, to place a pair of donated jeans in front of Sam Weate at one of the BARN sorting tables.

"(We) filled my living room with diapers, lotion ..." said Rafferty on Dec. 16 after she, staffer Becky Goodman, and five volunteers helped unload all the gear and bring it inside.

She later added, "I was so amazed at the amount of

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stuff people brought.”

Every Christmas season, BARN staffers collect donated presents for the families it houses. BARN volunteer coordinator Becky Goodman said the no-profit is doing “the same thing with using the Web site for listing our gifts” asked for by the mothers.

As in previous years, one of the goals of the Christmas drive is for mothers to receive a few moderate gifts to give each of their children, rather than a pile of expensive toys.

The reason is that BARN staffers want “to try to keep it a little more realistic for what (the mothers) can handle next year when they graduate from BARN,” said Goodman.

“We didn’t want sky-is-the-limit kind of giving,” she said.

A step into one of the community kitchen rooms revealed an 18-piece baking and food-storage kit. Goodman said an anonymous donor dropped it off.

Back up front, Carrie Frank

entered through the front door carrying books, a PSP 2 spelling challenge game, and a puzzle: her donations didn’t need to come in a massive bag in order to state their value was in learning.

Sure enough, the downturned economy hasn’t made enough of a big deal for the Grinch to directly steal Christmas from the mothers at BARN. Yard sale revenue came in at \$32,000 this year, a \$5,000 increase from 2008. There was a pinch, however, according to Goodman, when their annual Festival of Trees fundraiser generated less money than usual.

Then again, inside the living room where mounds of sorted black trash bags filled with donations sit on top of tables, something is clearly working.

Success also comes in who shows up to volunteer. During this one particular Wednesday

afternoon, Brentsville District High School seniors Kelly Willett, Sam Weate and Katelyn Wampler, along with freshman Matthew Wampler, all stopped by to sort gifts.

The group’s leader, Debbie Page-Nance, lost her son last year to a stray bullet, which turn caused her to start up a nonprofit called The Joe 15 Team, which is focused on promoting charity and raising awareness about violence. It now has four local chapters, including groups at Brentsville, Stonewall Jackson High School, Stonewall Middle School and Manassas Christian School.

Even though the students can earn volunteer-hour credit by participating in the group, most help just for the sake of helping.

According to Willett, “Even if we didn’t get anything for it, we’d still be here.”



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TIS THE SEASON: Above, Gainesville resident Anna Rafferty, left, chats with BARN volunteer coordinator Becky Goodman while carrying diapers toward the transitional house for abused women. Rafferty collected Christmas presents for the mothers at BARN from about 40 women in the Virginia Oaks community. At right, Brentsville District High School senior Katelyn Wampler crouches down in front of BARN volunteer coordinator Becky Goodman to place a wrapped present under one of the tables of gifts. At far right, Brentsville District High School freshman Matthew Wampler categorizes a donated present at the BARN Transitional Housing living room. Wampler volunteered at BARN with his sister Katelyn and fellow BDHS students Kelly Willett and Sam Weate on Dec. 16, helping the staff sort through Christmas donations.