

Businesses, crisis center team up to give gifts to families

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By Liz King

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Local businesses and community residents are being invited to make the holiday season happier for families affected by domestic violence by participating in the Giving Tree, a gift-giving program organized by the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center for their clients.

"All the families are so thrilled that they can give their children a Christmas morning," said head volunteer Cintra Warden.

Holiday trees at Interlocks Salon and Spa and Valentino's Hair Salon feature gift tags with individualized holiday requests for children and parents. Area residents are invited to buy a gift, which will be donated to families served by the center. Requests on the gift tags are primarily toys and clothing, but there are also requests for help with Christmas dinner or shopping.

"This should be a joyous time of the year for everyone, particularly families who have suffered, and the community wants to give back and give joy," said Suzanne Dubus, executive director of the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center.

People are also invited to visit Jabberwocky Bookshop or the Book Rack to purchase an individually selected book matched to an unnamed child whose family has been affected by domestic abuse.

"Our goal is that every child involved in our programs will receive a new book as a special gift," Warden said.

Warden said the two bookstores participating in the "Book for Every Child" program have been very enthusiastic about helping, as have local businesses and organizations, 14 of which have already committed to adopting individual families.

The Institution for Savings, Interlocks Salon and Day Spa, Currier and Associates, Valentino Salon, Chase and Lunt Insurance, Arthur S. Page Insurance, Carry Out Cafe and St. Paul's Episcopal Church, all of Newburyport; Munters Corporation, Amesbury Industrial Supply and Educational Child Care of Amesbury; Andover Healthcare, Inc. and Latitude Sports Clubs of Salisbury; and Home Made Brand Foods, Inc. in Newbury, will all fulfill a family's wish list.

In addition, the Maritime Landing condominium complex in Newburyport and the Newburyport Garden Club are purchasing gift cards to businesses such as Market Basket, Wal-Mart, Kmart and gas stations, which will be donated to families to be used throughout the year.

"It's fantastic to have this kind of support from the community," Warden said. "It's so heartwarming and wonderful to get such an enthusiastic response from these businesses, who are glad to be a part of making a great Christmas for these kids."

Warden said she was delighted to see 17 volunteers show up to a kickoff party last Monday night, where they wrote up gift tags, strung them with ribbon, delivered them to local businesses and decorated the room at St. Paul's Church where mothers will come to pick up gifts. Last year, the Giving Tree program distributed holiday gifts to 52 families.

"I feel that the families using our services have gone through some very traumatic experiences, and this is a way of trying to bring some normalcy into the lives of these families," Warden said. "In our society, there's nothing more normal than waking up on Christmas morning and having gifts under the tree."

Donations will also be accepted at the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center's offices in Amesbury and Newburyport.