

Keeping Sisters families warm

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Every fall and winter for the last several years, families in need were kept warm with donated coats, shirts, pants and boots from Columbia Sportswear Company and the dedication of two Sisters-area volunteers — Wayne and Luann Danforth.

Luann and her husband, Wayne, originally from the Portland area moved to Sisters in 2001. A physical education teacher from Centennial Middle School in east Multnomah County, Luann saw first-hand children coming to school without rain gear or winter coats.

“I remember another teacher standing at the entrance to the school,” says Danforth. “She would ask – did you forget your coat today? And sometimes the student would answer quietly, with their head tucked down, ‘No, I don’t have one.’”

Luann grew up knowing Marie Lamfrom; founder, along with her husband, of Columbia Hat Company in Portland. Luann was connected with Marie through her involvement with the Girl Scouts. Marie’s son-in-law, Neal, and daughter, Gert, took over what became Columbia Sportswear in the mid-1960s. 24 years ago, when Luann first was tasked with finding a jacket for one student in need she approached a member of the Columbia family about purchasing one at a discounted rate – the jacket was donated. The next year, two jackets were donated and

the Danforth’s were asked if they could use more.

“I remember going into the Columbia Sportswear Store in Sellwood,” says Luann. “There would be a box of jackets for us to distribute to students who needed them.”

Soon, the program grew. Pick-up was done at the Columbia Sportswear warehouse in the St. John’s area of Portland — and it was much more than just one box. The program became known as “The Rethreads Program,” donations came from factory samples, remaindered clothing and returned but usable merchandise. The Danforths, along with a few of their friends, would drive their utility trailer to the warehouse and pick up 50-60 boxes at a time of product, usually in the spring. Over the next several months items including jackets, pants, shirts and boots were sorted, cleaned, and repaired by fixing buttons, zippers, small tears or other minor repairs. Items were handed out through the counseling office at the school where Luann worked in Portland.

In 2001, after retiring from teaching, the Danforths made the move to Sisters. They caught an article in *The Nugget* about the Family Access Network (FAN) and knew they could help. Immediately, Luann called Theresa Slavkovsky, one of two Sisters-area advocates for FAN, and offered to provide a similar program for Sisters-area families in need.

Since 2001, every spring,

Wayne and Luann have made the trip over the mountains to the warehouse in St. John’s and picked up box after box, between 500-600 items, for those that may have fallen on hard times in Sisters. Once again, they rallied their friends and their community to sort, clean and repair items for distribution. Until this year — Wayne and Luann retired from their work in The Rethreads program in 2015.

Twenty-four years later: More than 7,000 items distributed. The Danforths have left big shoes to fill, but their good work will continue to live on. New volunteers have stepped in and are continuing the relationship with Columbia Sportswear. There are very limited items available for elementary through high-school age students through FAN this fall and winter. In the spring of 2016,



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Luann and Wayne Danforth have quietly been keeping folks in need warm.

a new trailer will head over the mountain; and pick up boxes of gently used product to be sorted, cleaned and repaired to keep families warm in Sisters Country. This new group of volunteers will once again rally their community to support each other — and do it all in Wayne and

Luann’s honor. The Danforth’s were honored to receive an award from The Family Access Network in 2013 for their volunteer contributions to the organization. “It’s just something we could do,” Luann said. “So we did it.”

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