

SHOEBOXES: Project has grown into major church contribution

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This year over \$14,000 was raised to help fund the huge project. The monies were used to buy all the items needed for the shoeboxes, and also to help with the expense of shipping: seven dollars per box.

In addition to the supplies that were purchased, the kids (kindergarten through fifth grade) at Vast Church had a goal to make 500 bracelets to include in the boxes. They exceeded their goal by far, and made over 1,000 bracelets.

Ella Bartlett (10 years old) made numerous bracelets for the project and shared the reasons why:

"I wanted to help make sure we had enough so each box could have a bracelet," said Bartlett. "It will make a bunch of kids happy, because they don't get all the stuff we do."

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— Ella Bartlett

Another member at Vast made 850 scarves and 200 hats, also to be included in the boxes.

A week prior to the packing, the kids packed over 2,000 bags of candy, and the night prior to the event, 50-plus people gathered to set up all the tables, and stock them — on top and underneath — with everything that would be packed inside.

On Sunday morning, the entire congregation, and members from the community, worked together and

packed the boxes. People chose whether they wanted to pack for a boy or a girl, and also chose an age category; 2 to 4 years old, 5 to 9 years old, or 10 to 14 years old.

The boxes were packed with love and prayers, and will be the first gift that most of these children have ever received. But, each box is much more than the simple items that are enclosed. It's a gift that keeps on giving. Included in the box is a message of love and hope found in Jesus Christ.

OCC makes it possible for millions of children to experience God's love through shoeboxes filled with gifts. The shoeboxes open doors for presenting the Good News of Jesus Christ by working in and through local churches where possible, offering children literature through culturally appropriate evangelistic and follow-up programs.

The annual event is one that everyone looks forward to. Several shared how they felt about Operation Christmas Child.

"I so appreciate the chance to share," said Robin Green. "I wouldn't know how to do this by myself. Seeing everyone gather together so that children can have a Christmas is a thrill."

Stacy Ransom shared, "I think OCC gives us the ability to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others and love them unconditionally. And really, we're the ones who receive the greatest gift!"

Daniel Aguirre said, "Besides being able to serve and bring joy to kids around the world, it's knowing they get to have a Christmas and a gift. My prayer is that God will show up in the midst of their situations."

On Monday, the boxes were taken in a U-Haul to Bend, and from there will be put on a semi-trailer that will head to Los Angeles for

processing, and finally the boxes will shipped out to children around the world.

Last year, the boxes that Vast Church packed were sent to the Philippines and to Nepal. Samaritans Purse is still at work in the Philippines putting in water-filtration systems, and building houses for those that lost their homes in the tsunami two years ago, and the shoeboxes were added to that endeavor.

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JamiLyn Weber told *The Nugget* that the boxes open the door for people to be cared for.

"Over the years I've come to realize that many times it is about way more than the original gift," said Weber. "The child receives a shoebox and is hopefully reminded they matter. They are loved. Then, their joy hopefully connects their family to the local church, who begin to meet some of their needs. In some of the poorest places in the world, like Nepal, that can mean a family no longer needs to abandon a child or sell a child into prostitution to feed the rest of their family. It seems crazy, but one simple gift can begin to make a big difference."

Since its inception in 1993, OCC has collected and delivered more than 124 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in over 150 countries. This year, OCC hopes to collect enough shoebox gifts to reach another 11 million children.

CALDERA: Program one of 12 selected in nation

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Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award to the White House to recognize their effectiveness in developing learning and life skills in young people by engaging them in the arts or humanities.

The 12 community-based organizations from across the country were chosen from a

pool of more than 285 nominations and 50 finalists from all 50 states to receive the highest honor awarded to such programs in the United States.

The ceremony included a live performance by Rosie's Theater Kids of New York, who perform a medley of songs by everyone from Alicia Keys to George Gershwin, and remarks by 14-year-old high school student André Massey, Jr. of Deep Center in Savannah, Georgia who talked about how poetry changed his life.

STARRY NIGHTS: Sponsors should inquire now

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to Jackson Browne," where she offers a moving rendition of "Something Fine."

For her Starry Nights performance, Bonoff will be accompanied by renowned folk musician and guitarist-extraordinaire Nina Gerber.

Doors open at 6 p.m., so guests can enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres prepared by students of the Sisters High School Culinary Arts Program, under the guidance of their

teacher, T.R. McCrystal, renowned chef and co-owner of Cottonwood Café in Sisters; and a selection of fine wines compliments of Eola Hills Wine Cellars and Fullhart Insurance. The concert begins at 7 p.m., with an intermission featuring a live auction and paddle raise in support of Sisters schools. After the show, the artists will join the audience at The Belfry for dessert, coffee and a chance to sign CDs.

For information on sponsorship or other questions, email sistersstarrynights@bendbroadband.com or call 541-549-6299. Tickets are \$75 and go on sale February 15.

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