

TREE from page 1A

Then, just days before Christmas, Ambrosio, along with her assistant Karen Crowder and a group of volunteers, host a party for the teenagers to unwrap the presents.

"These young adults need things," Ambrosio said. "They get tired at Christmas. I wanted to put the spirit in their hearts. Many don't have a Christmas tree at home, so this party is for them. It's so festive, and they really, really enjoy it. It's so cool to give it to that age group that is hard to please. And they're so happy."

Anyone who wishes to help can take a list and buy what's asked for, bringing gifts back to Twin Lakes to be wrapped up and presented. Ambrosio, Crowder and staff also give money of their own, while a year-round fundraiser of bottle and can donations helps raise funds to fill out the lists.

"As to the popularity of the program, it comes down to how the gifts are chosen. Instead of

random gifts that people donate, the Giving Tree works off of specific lists that the kids provide. You need to get what they ask for," Ambrosio said. "If you get them something else, it might not be what they wanted. And you know how they are. We really do stick with the list."

Each list consists of three sections: needs, wants and educational. The requests are seldom frivolous.

"There's a lot of bedding this year," Ambrosio said. "Two beds, one wanted a mattress, one wanted a bed. That's heart-breaking, so I really do need to find that."

Clothing is a big request, including socks, a raincoat, boots and other necessities. "A lot of shampoo and conditioner," Ambrosio pointed out.

As to why they ask for it, the answer is simple. "They just don't have it," Crowder said.

"We've had five bras requested," Ambrosio said. "That's the first time we've had that requested since we've been doing it, and there's five requests."

The women said they are already working on buying the undergarments, "but it's okay if they get two bras," Ambrosio said.

"As a woman, you need it," Crowder added. "When one's in the wash, you have to have something to wear."

Despite the prevalence of basic needs, Ambrosio is seeing some positive trends in what the kids are asking for.

"I can tell by their wishes that the economy is better," she said. "At this point, I haven't found anyone that's homeless, of which we've had whole families. No flashlights or lanterns asked for this year. That tells me things are getting a little better. There's kids asking for beds."

After so many years, Ambrosio can also tell when fads are changing, too, particularly when it comes to clothing where it appears the 1980s and '90s are popular again.

"They're going to high-waist jeans," she said. "I think it's because of Taylor Swift, she wore them last year."

Three of the kids asked for Birkenstocks this year, and then there's the hoodies.

"They're all asking for hoodies," she said. "Hip hop hoodies. I had to Google what they were asking for on some of them. I knew Tupac, but XXXTentacion?"

But most of the clothes requested aren't specific: Shoes, pants, underwear. Again, the basics.

As for more "traditional" wishes, it's all about the scooters and electronics.

"iPads, laptops, phones. It seems like everyone wanted some sort of electronic device," Ambrosio said.

Last year, there were only three requests for iPads, with Twin Lakes Store able to pay for them out of its own fundraising. This year, Ambrosio may need a little more help from the community. One of the kids on their list pointed out that they usually need them for school.

"A lot of teens this year put educational needs," said Ambrosio. "All of them asked for pencils, backpacks, lunch boxes, books. Water bottles were on a lot of them."

The program is expanding its reach this year, more than doubling the number of teenagers to receive gifts from 40 to 100.

"Last year each kid got a lot, and I'm thinking the money spent could have helped more kids," Ambrosio said. With the newly opened liquor store at Twin Lakes, she added, "We're busier and getting more customers and more people know



JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS
Twin Lakes Store owner Vicki Ambrosio (right) and employee Karen Crowder are excited to help the community provide holiday gifts to 100 teenagers this year.

about us. I thought we could get more money, so I'm aiming for 100. It's crazy."

The reach now extends to any student residing in the Siuslaw School District, including those who homeschool or attend alternative schools. The ages are 12 to 18, "but 18-year-olds have to be in school, otherwise I consider them adults," said Ambrosio.

So far, she's gotten 60 wish lists from area teenagers, but has room for 40 more. As for how they pick the teenager, it's done mostly through word of mouth.

"We put fliers up, letting people know," said Crowder. "I've talked to several businesses, letting them know it might benefit one of their employees, or they might know a family."

Ambrosio added, "There's a lot of grandparents out there who are raising these kids. This program has been very helpful for them."

For the first time, the program has a website so teenagers can sign up online at twinlakesstore.com.

"I've only had one take advantage of online, but I do hope more kids come in that way," Ambrosio said.

Because of the influx of students served, the giveaway party is also being upgraded. Beforehand, the event took place at Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue's (SVFR) Sutton Lake Fire Station. However, that station was too small for 60 plus kids, so this year they're moving to SVFR's Station 1 on Highway 101 on Thursday, Dec. 19.

"They're taking the fire trucks out and we're doing it in the garage," Ambrosio said. "They have 50 hooks for uniforms that they'll take town, and we'll put two stockings per hook to get to 100 stockings, hung up with care."

Also new this year is a special viewing of presents for all those who donated.

"Our community is extremely generous, and this is no exception. A lot of people like to watch the kids open the presents, but I hate to put the kids as a spectacle," Ambrosio said. "With 100 kids, if they each bring one adult, that's 200 people in the station, which will max the space out. So I'm doing a viewing from 4-6 p.m., just before the party, so people can see what it looks like. That way they can see it and be a part of it."

To donate to the program, contact Ambrosio at 541-997-3021 or stop by Twin Lakes Store at 88940 Highway 101.

Florence Food Share provides food to those who are hungry in our community. If you have four hours a week available, we are in need of volunteers to staff our Front Desk and also act as Guides as clients walk through the pantry. Please call our volunteer coordinator, Sarah Lovejoy, @ 541-997-9110 (Monday - Friday, before noon) to learn more about volunteering. info@florencefoodshare.org 2190 Spruce Street.

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