# Sandy family comes Together for Better

Created on Wednesday, 12 December 2012 02:00 | Written by Kristopher Anderson |

The Coles gather donations to distribute on Christmas morning

Jim Cole walked along the frigid streets of downtown Portland just before sunrise on Christmas morning last year. With an armful of clothes, cookies, toiletries and more, he canvassed the neighborhood, searching for anyone down on their luck and needing a gift that could ease their struggles.

Standing by his pickup loaded with items ready to be distributed, Cole was approached by a man, walking proud and looking polished.

Cole didn't remember the man, but the man certainly remembered Cole. A year earlier, he received several items of clothing from the Cole family, and, with gratitude in his voice, he told Jim how that changed his life.

"With that outfit, I was able to get a temporary job," the man said.

Helping someone to that extent was unimaginable three years ago when Jim, his wife, Donna, and daughter, Heather, started "Together for Better," a tradition of handing out goods to homeless folks in downtown Portland on Christmas morning. And now with the holiday a couple weeks away, the Cole family, of Sandy, is in the midst of a frantic effort to collect enough items for the roughly 150 people they'll assist.



by: CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - The Cole family organizes 'Together for Better,' a yearly tradition of distributing goods to homeless folks in downtown Portland.

"We just opened up the doors and said, 'Yes, we'll take something and find a place for it,' " Heather said. "Everyone does really want to do something, and even giving one jacket is empowering individuals to say they helped this group because they did one thing."

People have flocked to the Coles in the time since they started the program, trying to help any way they can.

Bins for donations that will go to "Together for Better" are set up at the AntFarm Christmas tree sale in the Sandy Historical Museum parking lot. Subway donates 100 sandwiches. Dentists donate toothbrushes and toothpaste. Yuliana Gomez Barrales, a senior at Sandy High School, has gotten the National Honor Society, the school's students and newspaper and a group at Mt. Hood Community College involved in the program.

"It's really cool to see how invested everyone gets," Barrales said. "And it's cool seeing that our younger generation is helping out with this and being able to be part of a really great program."

But big dreams didn't exist when the Coles embarked on this project in 2009.

They wanted to escape the routine of gift giving by helping those who were less fortunate, so they decided to call several soup kitchens, shelters and food banks. After learning those places already had all the help they needed, the Coles decided to organize their own event.

To spread the word, they started a Facebook page, messaged friends, emailed dentists and scoured the community looking for donations.

They also baked and decorated 500 cookies. Then, on Christmas morning, they piled all the donations in their truck and set up shop at 6 a.m. in an alley near the westside Voodoo Doughnut.

"We didn't want to spend any money that year," Donna said. "So we thought, 'Let's just skip gift giving and just go out and hand out some cookies. Let's get that spirit back of what Christmas is all about.' "

Last year, after word of the program spread, about 30 people, many strangers, were downtown to meet the Coles and help distribute their own goods that they collected.

"It's more than we expected, but it's because we have a great community around us," Heather said.

Each year, the program's popularity grows, and the family is encouraged they can collect as many items as ever. But they're still in dire need of backpacks, small fleece blankets, tarps and more.

The Coles hope reaching their goals means meeting the needs of everyone they see bright and early on Christmas morning.

"We're just one group of people who decided to do one thing," Heather said. "So if this isn't the one thing you want to do, then you should go do one thing because, collectively, it does make a difference."

ALSO ON **PAMPLIN MEDIA**

**ODOT finds no faults with troublesome flyover**
1 comment

**Middle of Millen Parade gears up for 17th year**
1 comment

**Jackson Bottom trails closed again after cougar sighting** 1 comment

**Kessi sticks to his vision for Wizer Block**
2 comments

**0 Comments**      Pamplin Media                                                    D Login ▾

Sort by Best ▾                                                      Share ↗   Favorite ★

Start the discussion…

Be the first to comment