

## County employees, volunteers adopt families, spread cheer

By GARY MASSARO

You could have come away from the annual Arapahoe County Adopt-a-Family program thinking it's sad there's such a need or a joy there are so many people who want to help.

Arapahoe County's Department of Human Services worked a half day on behalf of others whose holidays would be bleaker without their help.

Some wrapped blankets around their legs to stave off the wind that blew in every time someone came in the outside door to the Littleton Rooms.

It was a bitter wind, but the women had sweet expressions as they tallied the incoming gifts and told other people where to put them.

At another, other workers directed families in need to their gifts.

All around, other workers and volunteers hauled bags and boxes of things for families.

During the year, caseworkers keep an eye out on families who may need even more over the holidays.

So they compile need-and-wish lists. Then they put the word out to big and small businesses, organizations, families and individuals who might want to help.

"You've got to give them some of what they need and some of what they want," said Haley McKean, a spokeswoman for the county.

Some mothers asked for basics, such as toilet paper or diapers.

"It's expensive," said one worker.

The caseworkers also gather information on the ages and sex of children and what they have asked for, for Christmas.

Then the people who give, go out and buy the items.

Some who came to give walked away anonymous.

"They just want to give," McKean said.

A few others didn't have a choice. Reporters cornered them and asked them why they did it.

"It's fun to be able to help



Arapahoe County Department of Human Services workers joined volunteers in making the holidays a lot easier on some residents.

Photo by Gary Massaro

out kids and families," said Jim Soiland, who gave up his lunch break at Merrick & Co. to deliver bags and boxes of goodies.

About 40 Merrick employees pitched in. They had to rent a U-Haul truck to pack the stuff and deliver it to the county office.

Merrick describes itself as company specializing in engineering, architecture, design-build, surveying and geo-spatial solutions.

The Merrick employees all pointed to Pam Miles, an operations analyst in information systems, with heading up the effort.

Miles had adopted a family when her children were at Smoky Hill High School. Her children are now grown. So

Miles approached Merrick's Corporate Responsibility Team, telling the members about the program. They signed off, telling Miles if she wanted to coordinate the volunteer effort, it was all hers.

"I said gladly," Miles said. "I'm a single mom. I was never in this situation to need help like this. But I know how hard it was for me."

There was a stock answer from volunteers, so easy to say but so hard for some others in the community to carry through — it's all about giving back.

"As a company, we've been blessed," Miles said. "We've done well, even in this recession."

J. Johnson and Patti Roach

joined a crew of volunteers from U.S. Bank to help out.

"It's very important to give back," Roach said. "We adopted a family. And I wanted to be a part of it."

Johnson said his payback is seeing the faces of families who came to pick up the gifts.

"People don't give enough credit to the generosity of human beings," Johnson said.

This year, 210 families — around 600 people — are getting a Christmas boost from 196 businesses, individuals and other families.

This is the eighth year of the program.

"County employees created this program," McKean said. "It started with only 10 families."