

A Christmas story on wheels

Associated Terminals bikes coming to foster kids in St. Charles

Anna Thibodeaux - December 8, 2016

When Courtney Galbreath learned that a St. Charles Parish foster kid's bicycle that he relied on to get to the basketball court nearby had been stolen, she knew exactly who to ask for a new set of wheels.



As advocate supervisor for Child Advocacy Services in Luling, Galbreath went to Associated Terminals' Digging for Kids program and the immediate answer was yes.

Although the company is in Convent, the effort has grown to provide bicycles in its entire service area with 300 of them to be given this year. Of that total, 13 of them are coming to St. Charles Parish from the company's warehouse in LaPlace, and one of them is going to the little basketball fan.

But he won't know about it until Santa Claus delivers it for Christmas.

When Galbreath told the child's advocate about it, he responded in disbelief, "He's going to be off the wall when he finds out he's getting a new bike."

For those who give and those who receive, this story has more wheels on it than the bicycles themselves.

"Our kids don't ask for anything in particular, but to actually get a bike is like a getting a car," Galbreath said. "Especially at this time of the year, we try to make sure the kids are taken care of, but to donate bicycles is huge for kids in foster care."

For these children, a bicycle represents getting the world - literally.

“My kids don’t go to Boy Scouts and baseball teams,” Galbreath said. “This bike offers extracurricular activity that we can’t really provide. Foster families don’t usually get this stuff because they don’t know how long the kid will be there.”

They also often deal with living with family members who receive barely enough in state assistance to make ends meet. “You have kids placed with grandma with very limited means and doesn’t have the money for Christmas presents so they may just get the basics,” Galbreath said. “Foster parents don’t get funding for Christmas presents.”

People think there are no children in foster care in the parish, but she said that is a misconception. These children also can come from neighboring parishes to family members locally, and there are residences here with multiple foster children. She recounted one residence with six of them.

“For her to have Christmas for the six kids, they would have to go to the Dollar Store and just pick out something for them,” Galbreath said. And the hardship is year round when these children, who don’t get new backpacks or clothing for school.

At Associated Terminals in Convent, Joycelyn Himel, executive assistant, has handled the program for 17 years,

“At the very beginning, we would give toys to the children and would go shopping and get them all kinds of gifts – from shoes to pajamas to toys,” Himel said. “One day, one of the children said all he wanted was a bicycle, so when the bicycle came in the office, it was like a light bulb – maybe we should just give bicycles.”

And they did in 2005.

The program came together with the name, “Digging for Kids,” with fund raising done year round for the bicycle fund. Because Associated Terminals is a stevedore company, loading cargo onto vessels, employees have to “dig” to move cargo so the program name made sense for the company.

The program has grown to where 300 bicycles will be given to children this year in the company’s service area, including Plaquemines, West Baton Rouge, St. Bernard and St. James parishes, as well as St. Charles Parish.

Himel said they strive to provide bicycles that meet the need, including right-sized bicycles for children, and tricycles for senior citizens and children with disabilities because they are more stable, and larger bicycles for larger children and even Little Tykes toy cars for youngsters.

Galbreath, who worked in St. John the Baptist Parish with CASA for a year, learned about the program at that time and asked they include St. Charles Parish when she came to Luling.

And they did.

“I think it’s a wonderful thing that our company distributes to our community and area,” said Associated Terminals President Todd Fuller. “Everybody is always so thankful and appreciative that we do this for the children.”

Over the years, Fuller has seen children receive bicycles where it was obvious this was the first and only one they have ever gotten.

Galbreath added, “The people who donate have no idea what they’ve done. They’ve totally made this kid’s Christmas.”