

Kids present 'kits' to sheriff's deputies RAISING THE BILL

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BY HUGH MUIR
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Thirty-two kids in first through fifth grade went holiday "Shopping with the Sheriff" and a group of his deputies a month ago. Last week, they had a chance to give back in return.



Viviana Morales reads her letter of thanks with the Sheriff, volunteers and other students.

Tied up in ribbons, a collection of gifts was given by the children to Sheriff Charles Jett at a ceremony in Berea Baptist Church and to Capt. Steve Carey at a Rocky Run Elementary School pizza gathering. The gifts were shared by a team of deputies. The gifts were presented during a prepared speech delivered by a student. It read:



Captain Steve Carey and Deputy Earl Coffey talk with 1st and 2nd grade students at Rocky Run Elementary.

"This is a special kit, just for you. It contains: A lifesaver, to remind you that is what you are to many people; a safety pin, for all the safety you provide; gum, to use in 'sticky' situations; a shiny penny, to keep for good luck; a match, to light your fire when you feel burned out; a paper clip, to help hold things together; Tums, for all those fast foods that don't settle well; an eraser, to erase all the bad stuff; and Hershey Kisses, to remind you that you are loved."

The children--13 in first and second grade at Rocky Run, and 19 in third through fifth grade, who meet at Berea Baptist after school--are among many helped by Olde Forge Junction, a nonprofit organization in southern Stafford that seeks to give kids in difficult situations a boost. English is often a second language for them.

The annual Shopping with the Sheriff outing is run by the Junction, under its director, Theresie Houghton. But she points out that it is a combined effort with the sheriff's office (which provides the transportation), Dougherty's Tavern (which raises the money, \$5,600 this year) and numerous volunteers (who help chaperone).

The program stems from construction of the Olde Forge community in 1973, a collection of 229 townhouses, 80 percent of them rental properties. The Rocky Run school was built five years ago. The Junction arrived in the area shortly afterward and helps run after-school programs (and provides a neighborhood ice cream truck as well).

This past season's shopping trip was on Dec. 29, "to take advantage of the post-Christmas sales," Houghton said. The store of choice was the new Target on U.S. 17. Each child was given \$100 to spend as he or she pleased. The children are selected by Social Services.

So what did they buy? "Perhaps surprisingly to some," Houghton said last week, "they don't spend it on toys." It's not a question of what a child wants, she said. "The kids mostly buy what they need, from belts to underwear."

"I love to shop," said a first-grader, pointing to her new pink top and jeans. "I also bought a purse and some makeup."

"I bought clothes," fifth-grader Viviana said. "And I bought school things, pencils and notepads." Third-grader Kiara "bought socks, pants, shorts and shoes." She bought no toys. The deputies, she said, tag along and help them make their choices. "The deputies are our best friends," she said.

"What changes kids' lives," Houghton said, "is the presence of responsible adults, like the deputies." As for the value of the after-school programs, "those who participate are there because they want to be," she said. "They are kids who want to get ahead." Which is why the Junction-sponsored programs are called the "brain-builders."

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