



## *History of the Holiday Project*

### *Oldsters' Christmas Project*

Our Club also began its tradition of providing a Christmas basket each year to a needy family. One project begun in 1947 was Christmas gifts to the patients in the County Hospital (located on the corner of Fairview and Curtis in Boise). When it was torn down in 1957, the Christmas gifts were given to lonely nursing home patients and continue to this day.

Since 1971 this community-wide project has been co-sponsored by *The Idaho Statesman* newspaper, which had a similar project. The number of persons receiving gifts increased from 80 in 1971 to 177 in 1974. There were 139 nursing home patients and 38 were living in their own homes. The Good Samaritan Home was contacted for the first time in 1974 and five of their residents were included. They were so pleased with their gifts that they asked the home manager to write a thank-you note to us, which was signed by each recipient, one of whom was a 94-year-old woman. In January we received a letter from a member of the Wallace Zonta Club congratulating our members on our worthwhile service. She asked for information, which would help establish this type of service in the Wallace area.

It became such a well-known project that in February 7, 1975, a telephone call came from Mrs. Opal Fisher who asked for names of four persons on our list because she was unable to participate at Christmas time. Three wanted books and the fourth asked for Mogen David wine. She planned to deliver her gifts personally by Valentine's Day. Mrs. Fisher was the widow of Idaho's well-known author, Vardis Fisher.

In 1975, gifts from Caldwell, Driggs, Hazelton, New Meadows, Parma and Sun Valley indicated widespread approval of our project. Our co-sponsor, The Idaho Statesman, must be given much credit. Some of the heartwarming gifts that came in were a gift with a \$1.00 bill attached; another attached the picture of the donor – a tiny girl. In 1975, we spent approximately \$90 of our cash on sweaters, dusters, slippers, gloves, etc. The Idaho Statesman was recognized for their contribution to our project by award given to them from Soroptimist International of Boise in 2002.

Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century this project is still going strong. Each year during November and December, Soroptimist International of Boise sponsors a community-wide gift-giving project that benefits hundreds of needy individuals who live in nine area nursing homes/care centers. In 2002 over 700 Oldsters were helped, with more than 2,000 Christmas gift packages delivered to the nursing home residents, the majority of whom are women. This project has been so recognized and accepted by the very generous and loving community that we very rarely needed to purchase additional gifts with club funds to fill the "wish list." We even have wheelchairs

donated when needed! Between 25 and 35 volunteers are needed for this phase of the project.

*The Idaho Statesman* has cooperated annually with the club to make this project a success. The magnitude of the project requires a large amount of publication space and continued follow-up stories until the requests are completely filled. The newspaper also donated the telephone bank and a room for collection and sorting of the packages until 2002. Because of extensive remodeling and policy changes, the newspaper was no longer able to provide the telephone bank and room; however, *The Idaho Statesman* continues to print the requests and follow-up stories. Beginning in 2003, United Way of Treasure Valley has donated the telephone bank and a room for collecting the packages. Several local businesses also donated space as drop-off points for the packages. The local ABC affiliate provided TV coverage because this is a very “visual” project - a 20' x 40' room filled with hundreds of colorful Christmas gifts and busy Soroptimists is a good television image. In 2007, Simplot Data Center has donated the telephone bank space. In 2007, the “collection space” was donated by Hickory Farms warehouse and the local NBC affiliate provided TV coverage on their morning show during the “sorting” day at Hickory Farms warehouse where all the packages from the “drop-off” locations provided by local businesses were delivered for pickup by the senior care facilities. In 2008-2011, the phone bank location was donated by CH2M Hill and the “collection space” was donated by Excell Business Management. Beginning in 2017, “collection space” was donated by ServiceMaster Cleaning and Restoration Service of Meridian’s warehouse facility in Meridian, Idaho. The phone bank currently changes locations depending on where phones are available. In 2012, the phone bank was at Health & Welfare. Drop-off locations continue to be provided by local businesses also. In 2010, with the help of 2003-04 President Renée Kading (Beal) and Northwind Computers, the club went “hi-tech” and added a “shopping cart” on-line to their club website so that people in the community could select the names and gifts they wanted to purchase for the “oldsters” through the use of the internet. This reduced the need for number of phone bank volunteers and assisted in fulfilling the “wish list” much sooner as the names could be selected any time of day or night. People could also still call in if they did not have access to the Internet.

At the 2011, May Awards dinner program, a special recognition for public awareness was given to Jason Martin and Belzo Media, working with Northwind Computers, for their help in creating the on-line “shopping cart” for both the Oldsters’ project and the Plant Sale fundraiser project.



2015 – Sorting Day at Cutting Edge Kitchen’s Warehouse



2016 – Sorting Day at ServiceMaster Cleaning and Restoration Service warehouse facility



2017 – Sorting Day at ServiceMaster Cleaning and Restoration Service warehouse facility

The principal goal of the project is to help the indigent elderly who reside in local care centers meet their clothing and personal care needs. We have collected names of needy seniors in our community, including those in nursing homes as well as those living on their own in the community. Most of recipients are women because of the general make-up of nursing home residents, although we do not exclude needy men. Many individuals helped by this program either have no close relatives or have outlived the rest of their family. This project helps build relationships. Care centers are canvassed for information on residents' needs and wishes. The lists are published in *The Idaho Statesman* newspaper Thanksgiving weekend and during the week following publication; telephones are staffed by Soroptimists to take calls from the public, each “adopting” an Oldster from the list.

Packages are brought to a collection point. They are labeled, sorted, and bagged according to care center. In prior Christmas seasons we delivered 175-200 large bags of gifts; each facility is visited at least three times per week during December. Now the donations have increased to such quantities that we are not able to do the deliveries and the nursing homes come by several times to pick up the bags of gifts. Beginning in 2016, ServiceMaster Cleaning and Restoration Service of Meridian partnered with us to pick up the gifts from the local drop-off points and deliver them to their warehouse facility in Meridian, where the gifts for seniors are then sorted to be picked up by the twelve senior facilities. In 2018, T-Mobile staff volunteers spent several hours assisting in the processing, sorting, and bagging of the gifts for each facility. The Oldsters Christmas Gift Project has been a cornerstone of SI/Boise service for over 70 years, and is our “signature” event in the community. This longevity, linked with the Soroptimist name, is a principal reason for the project's success. Many individuals and businesses participate year after year because they know Soroptimists can be relied on to collect and distribute thousands of packages with efficiency and integrity. The project is a very unifying event in our community.

Literally hundreds of donors (individuals, families, schools, church groups, businesses, and organizations) join us in making sure that the elderly in need are remembered at Christmas. Club members have an opportunity for hands-on service to the community. This project was selected as a semi-finalist in the Federation's 1994 and 1996 Celebrating Success competitions. We received patches for our club banner. In 2005, a mission statement was drafted for the project. Oldsters Mission Statement: Through commitment to service, our mission is to be a liaison between the community and seniors in need, to provide a support network, which distributes community contributions.

### **Foster Children's Project**

Another part of the holiday project is the Foster Children's gifts. The Foster Children's Gift list for needy children in the community is also done by the Soroptimists with the lists printed in *The Idaho Statesman* in conjunction with the Oldsters' lists. This project was begun in 1976. To fund this program, the club chose to publish a cookbook in 1976 as their main project for the year. The proceeds from the sale of the cookbook were designated to help fund the Foster Children's program. The Governor of Idaho at that time, John Evans, even requested input from our club regarding foster children issues.

The children's gift list (over 900 items) is published by *The Idaho Statesman* at the same time as the one for the elderly. The Department of Health and Welfare and Soroptimists work together to fill these wishes for the children. The week following publication of the lists, telephones at Health and Welfare are staffed by Soroptimists to take calls from the public, each "adopting" a youngster from the list. Packages are brought to Health and Welfare to distribute. We also get many monetary donations at Christmas for this project. This money is kept in a fund to provide such things as swimming lessons, camping scholarships, medical needs including glasses and prescriptions, etc. for foster children. These requests come to us all year round from the Department of Health and Welfare. In October, 2002, we received a Thank You from Health & Welfare: "Thank you and all the members of Soroptimist Club for your generous donation to provide clothing for the sixteen year old in foster care. The social worker took her shopping and told me this morning that they were able to get her 3 pairs of pants, 3 sweaters, 2 long sleeve tops, a dress, a winter jacket and shoes. The social worker told me this young woman cried she was so happy. She is a very good student and will be in foster care until she is 18." This has been another very successful project identified with Soroptimists in Boise.

Since the internet method of adding a "shopping cart" to the club website was quite successful for the Oldsters' Christmas project in 2010, and a shopping cart on the internet was added in 2011 for the Foster Children's Christmas project. The gifts for the Foster Children are delivered to Health and Welfare to distribute. In 2018, ServiceMaster Cleaning and Restoration Service of Meridian delivered the sorted gifts to the Department of Health and Welfare.