

Local Woman Crochets for Aztec Wishes

Each year the students in the Business Technology program at Assabet Valley put their database management skills to work in a rather unique project – they organize, manage, and distribute toys and clothes to needy children through the Aztec Wishes program. Donna Groccia, the lead teacher in the program, has been carrying on this tradition for years, and gets lists of children, complete with ages, sizes and their wish lists, from the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC). “We try to take care of at least 100 children, and their families. The Assabet Valley staff and students are very generous and warm-hearted, with many individuals ‘adopting’ more than one child. Our students match up the coded gifts and prepare them for delivery to SMOC, where they get to entertain the little ones and keep them occupied while the parents smuggle bags of toys and clothes out the door for the big surprise on Christmas morning. We try to give grocery and gasoline gift cards to each family as well. It’s not just a lesson in database management, from inception to completion, but it’s also a lesson in the rewards of community service and compassion for those less fortunate. It gives each of us a warm feeling as we realize how appreciative these families are,” says Groccia.

Although almost all of the gifts are donated by the Assabet Valley school community, there is one special person in particular who has joined in since about 2010, donating dolls with handmade crocheted doll clothes. Chris Ledder, from Marlborough, can’t even remember how she learned of Aztec Wishes, but she has been reaching out to those in need for years. Before she began to crochet, she and her family donated toys to the Holiday Helpers program that was run by the Marlborough Human Services Department, and also through the Angel program at St. Ann’s church, but both of those have since disappeared. Ledder says they still donate to Toys for Tots, and will continue to do so, but with Aztec Wishes, she can enjoy her hobby at the same time. “This way the kids get not just a doll, but one that has stuff to play with once they open the gift,” explains Ledder.

“After I learned to crochet about 6 years ago, I started making doll clothes for my nieces’ dolls. As they outgrew the doll stage I still liked making the clothes but, it was hard finding a charity that wanted the clothes. It may just be hard to process them. Boxed toys are easier to manage. When I contacted Assabet they were very welcoming of the dolls and the clothes. I even sent a bunch of crocheted play food I made during a crochet challenge one year. That is actually one of the things that have attracted my crochet friends. We love making doll clothes and many of us don’t have little ones that need the doll clothes any longer. However, it isn’t as easy as you would think to find charities that want the handmade toy items.

“My friends and I are part of an internet website called Crochetville. One of the groups on that website is Boxing Day Crochet Along. The thread starts new each year and we post about our charity crochet projects. Most make clothing, blankets, or animal items for various charities. I make doll clothes and toys. After posting about the clothes I was making for Aztec Wishes I heard from two online friends, one from Florida and one from Canada, that they had some items for my doll project. You’ve seen the beautiful things

they've sent. One had already pledged help for 2016 before I delivered the items, and my Canadian friend, on hearing how much her stuff was welcomed, has promised more for next year, too. It is a unique thing that Assabet does and I wanted my friends to have that experience as well.

“This doll donation wouldn't be possible without the support of my husband who is incredibly helpful and supportive of this project. I also get lots of support from my friends at Crochetville who buy patterns, help me when I get stuck with directions that make no sense, provide encouragement when it seems like the dolls will never be dressed, and surprise me with huge boxes of clothes and dolls that I never saw coming,” Ledder continued.

“I couldn't believe it when Chris' husband dropped off six boxes of dolls and clothing items. The dolls are in five different sizes and the appropriate clothing items are bagged and coded. I wish we could see the smiles and excitement on Christmas morning when little girls open these. They are unique gifts and made with such care. We at Assabet are so appreciative of the help from this wonderful group of ladies,” added Groccia.