

Students part with playthings to aid youths in India

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

GATES — How strong is the gift-giving spirit among students at St. Helen's School?

Strong enough to be felt on the other side of the world, as one recent outreach project demonstrated. And also powerful enough to even gain Mother Teresa's attention.

Students at St. Helen's School, 150 Lettington Drive, participated in a recent benefit which provided a big dose of happiness to sick and impoverished children in India.

Earlier this fall, St. Helen's sponsored a highly successful toy drive, which concluded with an Oct. 24 prayer service at St. Helen's Church. All collected items were then mailed to Arlene Hasby, a nurse in Salt Lake City, Utah, whose sister-in-law, Laura Canne, is the mother of St. Helen fifth-grader Christina Canne.

Hasby took the four boxes full of new and used toys with her to Guwhati Assam, India, on a trip that lasted from Nov. 11-27. She was part of a 10-member contingent of doctors and nurses who spent that time performing plastic-surgery work at the Guwhati Assam Medical Center.

Hasby's group treated 120 patients on behalf of "Interplast," a non-profit organization of volunteer medical professionals who apply their plastic surgery skills in Third World countries.

The St. Helen's toys were distributed to children who were treated at the medical center. Many of those youths live at the Sisters of Charity Orphanage in Guwhati Assam.

In a recent telephone interview, Hasby acknowledged that the toys were received with extreme gratefulness.

"When the word was out that we'd brought toys, everybody wanted them. It was a major deal," remarked Hasby. "Even a lot of the nurses, who hardly made any money, came up and asked that if I had one more toy, could they have it for their own children."

"Every child we treated, their toy was by their bed every day," she added.

In addition, the Interplast group traveled to Calcutta on Nov. 26 for a personal audience with Mother Teresa at the Sisters of Charity convent. During the visit, Hasby delivered a check to another Sister of Charity to be used toward purchasing vitamins and medicine for poor Indian children. This money, totaling about \$75, was also collected during the St. Helen's toy drive.

"(Mother Teresa) said she wanted to thank us for the work we'd done," Hasby recalled.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Fourth-graders Heather Maciejewski (left) and Precious Townsend sing along with the choir during an Oct. 24 toy blessing service at St. Helen's Church. Last month the toys collected by St. Helen's School students were distributed to children at a medical center in India.



Sister Nancy DeRycke, SSJ, pastoral associate at St. Helen's Church, blesses the boxes of toys with holy water while student representatives stand on the altar and extend their hands out over the collected goods.

Back at St. Helen's, Christina Canne acknowledged that she felt good about being able to help improve the quality of life for others by parting with her used toys.

"One of my toys which had been swept under the bed is now being loved by somebody else," said Christina, 10.

St. Helen's fourth-grader Cathryn Kittelberger followed a similar line of thinking.

"My mother said that sometimes when

I get a toy and don't play with it, that's a toy we could give away because we have a whole box of toys and somebody else could use it more than us," said Cathryn, 9.

The two students had also been told by their teachers of the grim living conditions endured by many children and their families in India.

Christina recalled being informed that "they lived in houses that were made of sod and were really dirty."



Arlene Hasby
Mother Teresa met at the Sisters of Charity convent with Arlene Hasby, an aunt of St. Helen's fifth-grader Christina Canne and a medical-team member who traveled to India.

Cathryn added that she learned "that if they didn't have help, they would sometimes die."

Yet the help provided by Interplast and the St. Helen's students, parents and supporters certainly fit the words which Mother Teresa imparted upon Arlene Hasby in their brief meeting.

"She just kept repeating, 'Whatever you do, you do to God,' Hasby remarked.

"This is what Jesus would want us to do — to share with others," Christina commented.

"If I never gave away my toys, I would never feel as good as I do right now," Cathryn concluded.

Sr. Nancy was the McKenzies' guardian angel.

Last Christmas, Sr. Nancy O'Brien of Catholic Family Center's rural outreach program in Livingston County was the guardian angel for the McKenzie family. She rallied parishioners of St. Patrick's, Mt. Morris, to make sure Santa came to the McKenzie household.



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Pittsford parish slates lecture by Molly Kelly

PITTSFORD — Teenage sexuality, pregnancy, abstinence, contraception and AIDS will be addressed when well-known lecturer Molly Kelly visits Church of the Transfiguration, 50 W. Bloomfield Road, next month. Her lecture will take place at the church on Wednesday, Jan. 4, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The program, titled "Let's Talk," is open to teenagers and adults. There is no admission charge, but free-will offerings will be accepted.

Call 716/248-2427 for details.