

# Catholic Courier • Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal

## Fund helps start mom on road to the future

By Lee Strong  
Associate editor

Brandy Peckham's days are full of activity.

A single mother of two boys, ages 2 and 4, she works full-time at a store while also attending Corning Community College full-time.

Not having a car, Peckham relies on public transportation to get back and forth. But she did not have enough money this fall to pay for a bus pass.

That's when the Samaritan Center of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier stepped in.

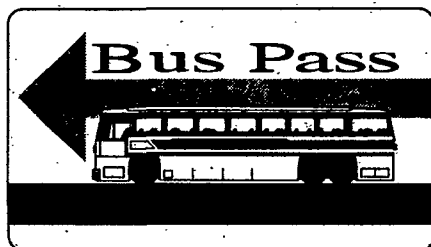
Using Christmas Appeal funds, the center helped her buy a pass.

Without that pass, Peckham acknowledged, "I probably would not have been able to go to school."

And not going to school would have lessened her chances of getting a better paying job, or eventually starting her own business.

The bus pass was only the most recent way in which the center has helped Peckham and her sons.

In April, she had bought a used trailer, only to discover that it had broken windows, faulty plumbing and a ceiling that began to give way. The center



helped her find an apartment in Elmira. It also helped her to get enrolled in the community college. In the past, it has helped her with medical bills for her sons. And last Christmas, the center helped her get food for her family.

"I really appreciated it," Peckham said. The variety of services provided to Peckham are typical of the range the center is called upon to furnish, acknowledged Cindy Smith, the center's director.

"We've had an eclectic mix this year," Smith said.

The center has used Christmas Appeal funds to help pay for medical expenses, rent, transportation costs and, especially these days, utilities.

"I think we've been doing more in terms of utilities in the past year than we've ever done before," Smith said.

"Some of the problem is that people have made payment/repayment plans, and then subsequently can't keep to them."

And according to city code in Elmira, a utilities shut-off can force eviction, Smith explained.

The Christmas Appeal was begun in 1969 to help people caught in such situations.

A combined effort of diocesan Catholic Charities and the *Catholic Courier*, the appeal was created to provide a pool of money that could help people in emergency situations who can't find help elsewhere, or who can't wait for that help to begin.

The need for that help is apparently increasing in the Southern Tier.

Smith said that more and more people are finding themselves facing emergencies, in part due to changes in welfare policies placing limits on the help people can receive from the government.

"We're seeing people, who were taken off the rolls, get a job and then get dismissed," Smith said.

As a result, "our numbers were up this past year," she said. "On average, we're getting five to seven requests for special assistance a day."

## What is the Christmas Appeal?

It is a cooperative effort of the *Catholic Courier* and diocesan Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester to raise funds for people in desperate financial crisis.

For the past 29 years, the appeal has enabled the Catholic community to help thousands of people in 12 counties to meet life's basic needs. Christmas Appeal funds have been there for them when no other sources of aid were available.

## Who benefits from it?

The Christmas Appeal helps individuals and families in short-term financial crises. These are people who have no financial resources and are either awaiting or are ineligible for assistance through other sources.

## How does it work?

Appeal proceeds are allocated to emergency funds of the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center; Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes; Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier; Catholic Charities of Livingston County outreach; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation; and diocesan Urban Services.

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## Neediest Cases



Monies collected during the *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal aid people throughout the year, but especially at Christmas. The following are some of the kinds of individuals and families who have been helped in the past with Christmas Appeal funds.

\* A couple with four children — one infant and the others ages 12, 8 and 3 — faced utility shut-off and possible eviction after the father lost both his jobs. Before losing his jobs, he had earned just over the maximum amount to qualify for public assistance. The Samaritan Center of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier used Christmas Appeal funds to pay enough of the bill to avoid shut-off and eviction, and staff worked with the family to develop a budget and a payment plan with the utility company.

\* A young man with a part-time job received notice that his father was gravely ill in Philadelphia. The son didn't have enough money to buy a bus ticket, and payday was several days away. He was given enough Christmas Appeal money to buy a ticket, and he arrived at the hospital just one hour before his fa-

ther died.

\* A woman in her 70s living on SSI was unable to keep up with her water bill, and it grew so large she was threatened with service shut-off. She received enough Christmas Appeal funds to pay one month's bill and avoid shut-off, and staff at the Samaritan Center of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier helped her work out a payment plan with the water company.

\* A single mother with a 5-year-old daughter was working part-time and receiving help from the CAP program. When her waterbed broke, she and her daughter had nothing to sleep on. Her income from her job and CAP was just enough to cover the family's basic needs of food, shelter and utilities. She was given money to help buy beds for her daughter and herself.

\* A 57-year-old married woman with no children was recently discharged after a one-week stay in a hospital for depression. She and her husband live on income through his job. They have no health insurance, and little money to purchase extras. Christmas Appeal funds in the amount of \$16.98 were used to help this woman buy medicine.

\* A single mother with four children needed \$50 to take a course to certify her to be a security guard and get off public assistance. The woman is now

working as a school crossing guard for the Rochester City School District.

\* A 20-year-old single mother was a refugee from China fleeing persecution. She had a 4-week-old baby and no financial resources available. Funds were needed to assist with food, formula and diapers while Catholic Family Center staff advocated to keep them in this country. Deportation to China could mean a death sentence for both mom and baby.

\* A single mother with a 9-year-old daughter depended on her vehicle to get to work as a visiting nurse's aid. When the car needed alternator and brake work, she did not have enough money. She was given \$115 in Christmas Appeal funds to get the car repaired.

\* A single mother with four children — ages 12, 10, 9 and 4 — was out sick for one week from her cleaning job at a temp agency and did not get paid. She was given \$30 in Christmas Appeal funds to buy some food for her family as money was very tight.

\* A single mother with two small children was recently discharged from a shelter for battered women. She received \$50 in Christmas Appeal funds to help purchase some household items at a local thrift store to start fresh in a new apartment.

\* A single father with two children —

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