

—Christmas Appeal—

Appeal helps family recover from fire

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

On the 11th day of Christmas, fate gave Carrie Johantgen and her fiancée, James Singleton, a house fire that nearly destroyed everything they owned.

The Rochester couple, who have a son, James, 2, and a daughter, Jayda, 1, were visiting Johantgen's mother when a fire — the cause of which remains unknown — began burning in their home Jan. 5, 2002.

"The first thing that came to my mind was 'Thank God my kids weren't there'" remarked Johantgen, 22.

"Some of the heat was so intense, it melted everything in the kitchen," recalled Singleton, 21.

"It was right after Christmas, and the day before my son's birthday, so everything we got for him was destroyed," Johantgen said.

The couple since has moved to another two-story home in Rochester, and is currently working together delivering phone books part-time. Singleton is learning how to drive tractor trailers, and also works as an assistant manager in an area restaurant. Along with the American Red Cross and Catholic Family Center, his employer, Bill Gray's, also helped him and Johantgen get back on their feet after the fire.

CFC gave the couple vouchers to buy household supplies, and also helped them obtain a used couch, towels and other odds and ends. When they moved into their current home on Linnet Street, CFC also helped the couple with their rent.

To help the young couple recover from the fire, CFC used funds from the Christmas Appeal, an annual joint effort by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester and the *Catholic Courier* to raise monies for people in emergency situations.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

James Singleton and Carrie Johantgen of Rochester, pictured with their children, Jayda and James Jr., received Christmas Appeal funds through Catholic Family Center after a house fire in January, 2002.

CFC first assisted Johantgen in 1999 during her first pregnancy, when a relative referred her to the agency's now-defunct program for young unmarried mothers. She has since worked with CFC's Emergency Services office on Clifford Avenue, which is part of the agency's Department of Children and Family Community Resource Services. The office has helped her turn her life around, she said, noting she has obtained her high school equivalency diploma.

Johantgen returned the favors she has received from CFC by volunteering at the Clifford Avenue office. She has worked in the donated clothing room and also has answered phones.

Renee Okafor, an emergency services case manager at the Clifford Avenue office, added that Johantgen has also helped out with the agency's

summer lunch program for area residents. She noted that Johantgen also returns items to the office that she no longer needs.

"When she had her children, she took good care of her (newborn) items and gave them back," Okafor said. "She's one of the people who doesn't overuse the services."

The Clifford Avenue staff is pulling for the young couple and their children to succeed, she added.

"We know they're really trying," she said of Johantgen and Singleton.

Although they split up once, Johantgen and Singleton have worked to make their relationship succeed, and they plan to marry on Valentine's Day next year. Both of them expressed profound gratitude to CFC for sticking by them.

"Basically, they're willing to help you in any situation," Johantgen said.

received a gas and electric termination notice in July, \$71.47 in Christmas Appeal funds were used to help her avoid further hardship.

★ A single mother with three children lives in the country far from any neighbors. She recently left an abusive husband who had tried to kill her. Though she had an order of protection, she needed to be able to call for help if he violated it. An outstanding phone bill put her phone service in jeopardy of being turned off, so \$99.35 in Christmas Appeal funds were used to pay the bill.

Prior recipients

Caseworkers from Catholic Charities agencies submitted the following examples of how Christmas Appeal funds are used year-round:

★ A mother and father have four children, ages 11 to 14, one of whom has a debilitating disease. The father works full time, but does not make enough money to buy extra items, such as a three-wheel bicycle that the ill child needed in order to exercise and have some independence. Twenty-five dollars in Christmas



Christmas Appeal

Appeal funds were used to help purchase the bicycle.

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