

A Christmas party for all seasons

Spearheaded by Carol Haskins and Mary Lou Swarner and supported by Kiwanians Linda Cook and Keith Warren--and a phalanx of volunteers--, residents of Mountain Shadows Community Homes enjoyed their most festive Christmas Party ever on Dec. 22.

Warren, in his third year here as Santa, had his hands and lap full handing out individualized presents. Cook, MSI Dir. of Community Relations, directed the army of volunteers. These included Scott Jones, Cherry Almazan, and Kim Nguyen--all members of the Escondido High School Key Club (sponsored by the Escondido Kiwanis Club). **[Please see related story, p. 2.]**

Festivities began at 11 a.m. with a parent get-together and brunch featuring fruit, dips, chips, rolls, finger sandwiches, and tortilla wraps. Then, the relatives rolled up their sleeves and worked at packaging 70 dozen home-baked cookies for distribution--with punch--to the Houses and staff. They wrapped 35 plates of cookies and topped them off with colorful bows and ribbons. There were sugar, gingerbread, chocolate chip, peanut butter, date, nut, exotic cookies.

The core of family support was Carol Haskin, parent and chairperson of The Friends of Mountain Shadows committee. Friends vice president Mary Lou Swarner was her organizational right hand. Promptly at 12:30 p.m. the residents began rolling in what turned out to be a veritable parade. The new party format brought residents to the main office, whose ample lobby space had been cleaned of furniture and theme decorated literally to the rafters.

Among the first up was Birch House. Activities Dir. Michelle Ridgeway, donned in her new red and green elf costume, handed presents from the Birch sack. Each had the resident's name. And each had been selected in a process that started with house managers' suggestions; continued with list collation by HM Kelly Brewer of Birch; and went to shopping by Haskin and Swarner. The gifts were wrapped by Lisa Shea's Girl Scout Troop.

The Friends of Mountain Shadows committee donated \$2,000 for presents. Some \$1,200 of that went to all residents (a \$10 average). The other \$800 went for additional presents for residents without family--to be opened on Christmas.

As Birch House (and other houses in succession), lined up with Santa and their packages, elf-attired Haskin snapped a group photo. Santa chatted merrily: "Harry, have you been a good boy this year?" And residents were asked not to open their presents until they were returned to their houses.

Of course, that didn't deter people like Kenny Lewis--who immediately peeled back the wrapping paper and found that he scored binoculars. Meanwhile, Frank Sullivan wrapped an arm around Santa in half an exuberant bear hug.

Ash's Bill Meritt bent Santa's ear. Santa had asked, "And what do you want for Christmas, Bill?" Bill responded: "I want a nice radio. And a nice wrist watch, and a nice pen..." Santa said, "We should be able to handle that." And Bill kept going: "... And a notebook and a lot of paper and..."

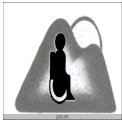
It was a major production. To keep the pace going, at least three houses at any one moment were on the move. Wheelchair pushers logged *miles*. And the Office was awash with up to 30 people at a time, watching, waiting, coming, and going.

"This was our largest turnout of parents and family ever," said Haskin. "And we needed every one of them. They were a lot of residents to move." The Escondido H.S. Key Club volunteers proved particularly adept at holding residents hands and calming them in the ultra exciting moment with Santa.

Festive Christmas carols on tape rang out as background music. And the party extended down the Office ramp with chairs arriving at the staging area parking lot outside Pine House. There, Debbie Rawlings of Willow announced, "My boy friend is Doug Devereux [of Crepe Myrtle]." She introduced Doug and said they loved one another. Debbie was smiling, happy, proud, and sitting tall in her new red electric wheelchair.

Kenny Lewis (draped in his new binocs) joined them as they awaited the remainder of Willow and Crepe Myrtle to join their queue toward Santa's attentions. Bob Curcio, wearing a spiffy new silver and green helmet, called out to Kristen Weller--then motoring her chair up the long driveway: "Put it on hydro speed, Kristen!"

Family volunteers were Carol Haskin (Mike, Jacaranda), Linda Cook (Brian, Lemon), Cynthia and Bill Neville (Lisa, Plum), Judy Bunch (Eddie, Spruce), and Cheryl Edwards (Shawna, Orange). Also: Mary Lou Swarner, David Andrews (nephew to Wayne, Tangelo), Jamie Miller, Portia Bibb (Stacy, Tangelo), Gret and Bill Meritt (Bill, Ash). And Anna Gregory (Patricia, Orange), Susan Defelice (Sandra, Cedar), Donna Shaw (Cathy, Apple), Nedra Campbell and George Thomason (Nedra is sister to Mark, Ash), and Eleanor Kendrick (grandmother to Mike, Jacaranda).



Key Club: sense of service alive and well

We talked to a couple of the Escondido High School Key Club members who assisted in whisking residents to Santa and the Christmas Party. And, we must say, their sense of service is vigorous--and refreshing.

Kim Nguyen is 16 and a sophomore at Escondido High School. Scott Jones is 17 and a senior there headed this fall to BYU. Both are first-year Key Clubbers. (Key Club is sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Escondido.)

Their volunteer work for three leg-churning hours was wheeling scores of residents from their Houses to the Office party venue and back again. "I loved the experience," said Kim. Her strongest impression: "I liked the Houses. They are like regular family homes."

Kim first worked with persons with developmental disabilities as an 8th grader at Rincon Junior High School. There she assisted two other students in exercise and with hand therapy.

Her Christmas Party tasks were challenging, Kim admits. But she is used to challenge. Kim emigrated with her family of five from Vietnam in 1993 and has had to learn English and assimilate American culture.

Scott's Christmas Party help marked his third service project at Mountain Shadows. His two previous visits were with the Rincon Valley Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints. A week after the Party, Scott was in Pasadena with Kiwanis and other Key Club members on the night shift--pasting flower petals on the Whiskas Cat Food float.

"Key Club and my church, with similar service philosophies, make it easy to meet and help other people and expand my interests," said Scott, who'd like to be a physician.

"What impresses me here [at Mountain Shadows] is a nice environment with a lot of people who care. It's really good to be a part of this [sense of community].

"We [young people] need to be aware of what's out there and what needs to be done. Then, we can take action and give it our best. There is a world outside of yourself. And it very much includes people who benefit from a helping hand. Serving others, too, helps you avoid getting too caught up in your own needs and ego."



Tootsie Roll Drive

Another bright spot with helping hands

By Mary Lou Swarner

From Oct. 19-21, the Knights of Columbus of St Mary's Church (Council 4953) in Escondido held their annual Tootsie Roll Drive that benefits persons with developmental disabilities.

This is a nation-wide drive. But funds collected by our local K of C go to Mountain Shadows. **This year's dynamic chairman was Lou Silva, a retired Marine who kept things hopping. He was so involved and so caring. [See article, page 3.]**

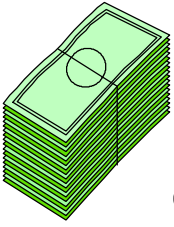
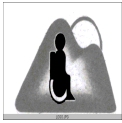
The Council had four stores to cover, one of which was K-Mart. There, our adult residents collected cash donations in exchange for a Tootsie Roll handout. They worked on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Two people worked together for two hours only. Eva provided transportation.

The kids really do love this and said it was so much fun. One fellow even went two times. Parents helping out were Janice Harris and Jeff Ferry. Schedule was: Saturday, Kathy and Sandy from Crepe Myrtle; Kenny and Travis from Birch. Bob and Brian from Lemon worked with Carol Fuller and myself and staff. On Sunday, it was Chris from Tangelo and Harry from Birch, Sherri and Kisha from Orange; also Debbie from Willow and Wayne from Tangelo and Chris again with Lisa Shea and two of her children. Pitching in were Mr. and Mrs. Lee Kleeberger and Israel of the staff.

Janice Harris and Jeff Ferry even stepped in and helped out in one of the other stores when they ran out of volunteers. Thanks to all who helped. This year, \$4,800 was raised and donated to the Friends of Mt. Shadows (previously Mt. Shadows Support Group). This money provides vital funding for Circus Day, dances, and Christmas gifts.

Thanks to our many volunteers

There are so many of you, it's hard to know where to start. There have literally been scores of people who have pitched into Mountain Shadows events and activities since the fall Tootsie Roll drive. Thanks parents, residents, staff. Thanks to Linda Cook and her Kiwanis and Key Club. Thanks to the Knights of Columbus, their Squires, and the students of St. Mary's Catholic School. Thanks to one of the most dynamic men we've met: Col. Lou Silva (ret.). Thanks to all our Thanksgiving chefs and Christmas Party shoppers, Carol Haskin and Mary Lou Swarner.



Col. Silva: the man behind the Tootsie stash

For eight years, the chairmen of the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll drive benefiting Mountain Shadows have been dedicated and effective. But this year's results, under chair Luciano "Lou" Silva, were other worldly.

Typically and like clockwork, past October campaigns have registered between \$1,000 and \$2,000 raised. This year's total went off the charts at \$4,800.

Silva is a retired Marine colonel who brought a sense of military management, discipline, and organization to the sweet-tooth drive. He received the highest of praise *before* any funds tabulations were in. "He is just so dynamic, you have to interview him," Mary Lou Swarner told us. And so we did. We were among the first to hear the total, and passed it along to Swarner.

"Forty-eight hundred dollars!" exclaimed Swarner, vice president of Friends and our head volunteer to the drive. "I am just floored and astounded." A check for that amount will be presented to the Friends this month.

To put that sum in perspective, Mountain Shadows annually raises about \$14,000 in its charity golf classic. That event literally involves a cast of hundreds. Silva pulled off his record-breaking sum with perhaps 20 volunteers. They included staff and residents of Mountain Shadows, Squires (the sons and daughters of K of C members), and students at St. Mary's Catholic School.

Next year, returning as drive chair, Silva has plans for 50 volunteers and basic training for the future chairman. And he'll again utilize his timeline checklist, or what he calls The Plan of Actions and Milestones, beginning 90 days before the event kicks off.

"It takes a little bit of dedication and good organization," said Silva, who retired after 34 years with the Marines. That time included seeing action in Vietnam. Silva was also a military advisor to the civil war in El Salvador in the early 1990's.

Silva, who is employed today as an agent for First Command Financial Planning in Oceanside, worked 12-hour days on the drive from Oct. 19-21. He *was* the command post to the four retail outlets: K-Mart (which Mountain Shadows staffs), El Tigre Market, Stater Bros. and Ralphs. In all, volunteers handed out 23 cases of Tootsie Rolls.

"After 34 years in the military," said Silva, "I felt it was time to give something back to the community. I want to emphasize that all I did was act as a coach. The real labor was done by those folks handing out the candy and talking to people."



A Saturday morning visit to Orange House

By Brian Wiersema

It's Saturday morning at Orange House, and a bright winter sun through large windows warms a living room which visitors have brought to life.

Brian Cook, a 31-year-old from Lemon House two doors away, is courting his lady friend, Betsy Christensen, 26. In wheelchairs, these two "clients" hold hands in front a television with the volume low. Betsy, blind and with Rufsun's disease (nerve deterioration), is Brian's "number one girlfriend".

They are a handsome and compelling couple. Brian is good looking and shy. Betsy is exuberant, and attentive to Brian. They date, exchange presents, go out for dinner, and sometimes kiss, Betsy admits. "He's nice," Betsy explains. "Brian gives me videos. And I like his mom and dad."

Brian has cerebral palsy. His parents, Doug and Linda Cook are, respectively, the CEO and the Director of Community Relations of parent-owned MSCH.

Also visiting Orange this day are Sharon Fabian, the house manager of Tangelo House next door, and Chris Groves, a Tangelo resident who uses a wheelchair. Chris, 29, and Sharon are close. They've been like family together here for 14 years.

"Chris is outgoing," says Sharon, who has been on staff for 16 years. "He does a lot for everybody. Known as 'Mr. Hallmark', Chris creates cards for people's birthdays and holidays. He makes people laugh, and is a mover with many friends. (Cont. p. 4)



...*Visit to Orange*

(Cont. from page 3) But he gets in a slump when I'm not around. When I go on vacation, I still phone him to keep in touch."

Chris, who has cerebral palsy, is waiting for his lady friend in Orange, Patricia Gregory, who is still off primping. Like Brian and Betsy, they are "an item" and have been for eight years.

Like the 117 residents at Mountain Shadows, Chris participates in a day program weekdays. He works doing janitorial chores for the Boys and Girls Club of Vista. "He takes his job seriously, and he is a very hard worker," says Sharon. "He loves little kids and they love him, partly because Chris is a cutup and a joker."

Near the couch, Shawna Kick, 27, and her Orange House roommate Robin Barnett fold clothes still warm from the dryer. Robin is deaf and has a spinal deformity. Shawna has partial paralysis and a seizure disorder and, for now, a fractured right kneecap with nine screws beneath a thick cast.

Shawna suffered a recent fall while walking outside. "She gets excited sometimes, and her body doesn't move as fast as her



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brain does," says Stacy Miller, a staff RN, consulting a medical folder on Shawna. Each client, Miller points out, has a file as thick as a San Diego phone book.

Shawna, even in a wheelchair with the knee elevated these past two months, seems to move a mile a minute--at least mentally. "She is very independent and likes to do everything *now*," says Orange house manager Carol Cervantes. Shawna performs light-duty secretarial work for Unlimited Quest and is absolutely abuzz in her social life at Mountain Shadows. She's also on the floor hockey and softball teams.

Like Betsy, Shawna lived at home until she was 21. But both of them craved independence and more social life. To the delight of their moms, when Betsy and Shawna moved into residential living with other persons with developmental disabilities, they blossomed. Each is today an endearing, luminous woman.

Shawna's mother, Mrs. Cheryl Edwards, explains: "Before moving to Mountain Shadows, Shawna did not have sufficient social outlets. She was bored, moody, irritable, and discontented. Today, Shawna just sparkles." Betsy--like Shawna--is upbeat and buoyant. "They see the positive side of things," says house manager Carol Cervantes. "Most of our residents have these crystalline positive outlooks."