

The Season of Giving

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Madelyn Augustine



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A section of all of the gifts bought by participating Quality Times.



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Every year, Millard West students are offered a wide variety of opportunities to give back to the community, but one fundraiser has been consistent throughout the years. For the past 24 years, students and staff have been participating in the Holiday Child fundraiser.

Student Council was looking for something that the whole school could participate in collectively during Quality Time; they decided to reach out to the Salvation Army to see if there was a way to help with the Angel Tree program. According to the Salvation Army, the Angel Tree program has been helping local low-income families and children ages 0-18 for the past 130 years. This holiday toy program relies entirely on the generosity of individuals and organizations of the Omaha community. Millard West is one of the hundreds of businesses, organizations and individual families that take part in the Angel Tree program, except to the Wildcats it is known as Holiday Child.

“Holiday Child cannot be compared to our other programs,” Student Council sponsor Mark Klein said. “We have been very fortunate over the years. It’s an activity that Millard West has truly embraced and I’m so grateful for this.”

Participation is completely optional, but most Quality Times do choose to take on the responsibility. If willing to participate, the QT will be given a toy tag at random that depicts an age range, gender and gift suggestions. Members in each Quality Time donate as much money as they desire which is then used to buy a gift of their choosing that they feel meets the criteria on their toy tag. A few QTs, like math teacher Beth Stilwell’s, even request more than one toy tag.

“I encourage all of my students to contribute,” Stilwell said. “If they don’t have \$5, I ask them to give what they can. They usually come through which is why we take on two children each year. So many of the students at Millard West have so much. It’s important

for them to take the opportunity to share with others when they can. It always makes me proud when I have students who want to go out and do the shopping. Learning to give is one of the greatest things I can help to instill in my students.”

For several students, Holiday Child is one of the more enjoyable fundraisers to participate in. With the ability to go shopping and pick out specific gifts for their Quality Time’s child, it creates a personable, hands-on experience.

“I look forward to taking part in Holiday Child each year,” senior Addison Dannehl said. “I know that somewhere, the money and gifts that I am helping donate are allowing a kid to have a great Christmas. This year my family has chosen to do our own Holiday Child, also. My favorite part is going shopping for gifts that I think will bring a smile to someone’s face on Christmas morning.”

On Dec. 11, every gift that Quality Times purchased were brought down to the band loading dock where Student Council members collected all of them and prepared them for the Salvation Army. The sight of all of the gifts together is a special sight for all participants every year. From there the Salvation Army picked up all the gifts for their Toyland Days on Dec. 15, 19 and 20. During these days more than 1,700 low-income families in the Omaha metro-area will be able to come and choose gifts for their children.

In total, around 5,000 local children will be provided with gifts through this program and collectively Millard West’s contribution helped provide gifts to roughly 200 of these children. Holiday Child is an opportunity for students to give a less fortunate child a delightful holiday, that they might not have on their own. This program allows people to take part in something bigger than themselves and learn a valuable life lesson on the kindness of giving to others.