



The fifth graders of West Hill Intermediate pose in the gym before wrapping their gift donations for HAVIN.

West Hills Intermediate Fifth Graders in the Spirit of Giving

by Sarah Hepfl

West Hills Intermediate fifth graders exchange their traditional gift exchange to help children enjoy the Christmas season.

Instead of holding the traditional student gift exchange, West Hills Intermediate students and teachers have bought, wrapped, and donated presents to children currently sheltered in our local HAVIN (Helping All Victims In Need) in Kittanning.

Courtney Cogley, a fifth grade teacher at West Hills Intermediate, explained how this new community project came to be.

"The reason we decided to do this (instead for this year's gift exchange) is we thought we would teach the kids the spirit of giving, as it feels so much better to give than receive," Cogley said.

Before this year, the fifth graders at West Hills Intermediate, had been participating in a class gift exchange, but this year chose to give to the community and spread Christmas cheer.

"This is the first time that fifth grade has decided to not do the gift exchange with the students and give something back to the community.

Our sixth grade does something very similar and they collect items and donations for Orphans of the Storm," Cogley said.

But how did the fifth-graders feel about not holding their annual class gift exchange? Cogley noted the children's

reactions to the project.

"The kids were really receptive to it - they weren't angry that they didn't get the little student exchange with each other so we're going to keep doing it," Cogley said.

Cogley went on to explain why HAVIN was the choice recipient for their Christmas present donation project.

"We saw a paper that listed how many children that our HAVIN has and there are a lot and the teachers and the kids wanted to give something back to kids who are in need this Christmas," Cogley said.

Heather Nicely, another fifth grade teacher at West Hills Intermediate, commented on what she observed during her and her students' participation in the gift giving.

"The kids in my class have been so excited about this project. They have brought in above and beyond what I ever thought they would, and they're very excited about it," Nicely said.

Shopping for family members is difficult as it is, but finding the perfect gift for a child you don't know can be quite a challenge!

The teachers organized a list of age groups in which each class was assigned to make it easier when looking for a present for the donations. Nicely helped her class figure out what items to shop for.

"They brought in money donations if they could not bring in a gift, if they weren't sure what to buy. My age range was 0-12 month olds so



Ms. Nicely helping students Bethany Richey (left) and Savannah Colberg, (right) wrap their gift donations.

I gave them some suggestions with diapers, binkies, baby lotions, toys, but they were so excited some of them would just bring in a money donation- anything they could do to help."

From the looks of this positive outcome of spreading Christmas cheer, it seems West Hills Intermediate will be continuing to give back to the community as a new tradition.

"I think they were more excited about giving to HAVIN instead of doing the gift exchange that we normally do. They were excited to give, and that's what Christmas is all about."