

GIFTS OF LOVE

Community Christmas store brings holiday cheer to thousands while raising funds for City Impact Center

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LORI ROMANO

For 17 years, a team of dedicated volunteers has helped make Christmas a time of happiness and hope for low-income families and children right here in Lincoln.

What began as a desire to give gifts to a few local families, who might otherwise have none, has turned into the Gifts of Love community Christmas store. The store provides families with the opportunity to give gifts during the Christmas season while raising money for the brand new City Impact Center, scheduled for completion in 2014.

More than 1,500 children were pre-registered for Gifts of Love. The store was open for five days at First Baptist Church, near 14th and K streets. From Dec. 12-14, parents were invited to shop. Children and teens participating in City Impact programs earned vouchers and were invited to the store to purchase gifts for their family members Dec. 16-17. By the time the 2013 store closed, more than 3,000 people felt its impact.

"The most important thing we do is provide a sense



Angela Pillow first came to City Impact as a single mother needing help. Now, she and her family focus on paying it forward by serving as volunteers. Angela also serves as a City Impact board member.

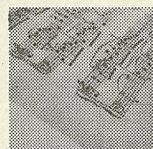
LINCOLN'S SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

EDWARD POLOCHICK, MUSIC DIRECTOR

CZECH LANDSCAPES

Friday, March 14, 7:30 PM
Lied Center for Performing Arts

An evening of Czech food and music. Dvorak's *Prague Waltzes* and three sections from Smetana's *Ma Vlast* conjure images of Czech landscapes and legends. The concert closes with Dvorak's *Symphony No. 8*, which draws inspiration from Bohemian folk music.



ROGUES & PRANKSTERS

Sunday, May 11, 5:00 PM
Lied Center for Performing Arts

Arias, waltzes, pranks and polkas! LSO's season finale includes excerpts from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, as well as masterpieces by both Johann and Richard Strauss.



Volunteers set up the store with gifts divided into age categories. Shoppers could easily find toys, books, clothing, accessories and even bicycles for all ages.



(From left) Volunteer Katie Ness, City Impact co-founders Carma and Brad Bryan, and volunteers Angela Pillow and Ashley Hopkins in the Gifts of Love store.

of stability for children and families," said Mike Friend, resource ministry director at City Impact. "Parents get to shop for their children, and the children get a chance to shop for their family members. Every item is either donated directly, or purchased with donated funds, and then marked down to 70 percent off the retail price."

Angela Pillow, who first came to City Impact seeking support for herself and her family, now volunteers and serves as a board member.

"A friend invited me to City Impact right around Christmas," Pillow said. "I was a single mom, and I was tired of my life and always struggling. I needed more than just spiritual help. The Christmas store kicked it off for us. My kids got involved in the reading program and I immediately noticed a big difference. Now we all volunteer. We are

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Todd Furasek and his daughter, Delani, volunteer in the gift wrapping room at the Gifts of Love community Christmas store. Delani takes her job of peeling off price stickers very seriously.

so grateful. This organization changed our lives, and we want to give back. That's what it's about – passing it on."

First year volunteer and board member Ed Osborn agrees.

"I used to be in the corporate world, traveling a lot, always busy, and then I got cancer 12 years ago," Osborn said. "This is a new chapter in my life. I'm trying to

achieve better life balance, and a big part of that is giving back because I have been given so much. I'm excited. This is something I will do every year."

This year, more than 1,000 volunteers gathered to make the 17th annual Christmas store a success. Nearly \$100,000 in donations poured in to Gifts of Love, keeping the Christmas spirit alive for more than



From small, beginner bikes to full-size teen/adult models, the Gifts of Love Christmas store makes buying a brand new bicycle a reality for shoppers.

3,000 people.

Proceeds from the store will be reinvested in City Impact programs, and will help fund the capital campaign for the new City Impact Center. Roughly \$830,000 still

needs to be raised to reach the \$4.5 million goal. To learn more about City Impact and how you can get involved, donate or volunteer, contact City Impact, 400 N. 27th St., Lincoln, 402-477-8080, www.cityimpact.org.

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