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Happy holidays given to those who'd have none at all *Arapahoe County's Adopt a Family program put presents under the tree*

AURORA, CO --- More than 200 families including seniors received gifts from strangers this holiday season through the Arapahoe County Adopt a Family program, which matches donors with local families in need during the holidays.

"Arapahoe County employees, local citizens, and community organizations and businesses, have truly embraced the Adopt a Family program and because of them more than 650 people experienced a very special holiday," said Lori Oswald, Arapahoe County Administrator. "These generous donators understood each family's needs and then went above and beyond. People even donated washing machines, furniture and laptops for college-bound kids.

For these families, times are hard with job losses or piles of medical bills. They were so thankful for the opportunity to provide their children with a break from the reality of their difficult lives this holiday season. It meant so much."

New this year was a Winter Wonderland celebration where clients receiving gifts could bring their families to enjoy a day filled with fun, food, photos and pick up their gifts. The event was sponsored by Convention Designs, an event planning company which after adopting a family last year decided this year they wanted to do more.

"Convention Designs provided such a special experience for our families. They made sure that even the smallest detail was prepared with thought and care from the ornaments on the tree to the 450 holiday gift bags with handmade labels. The kids loved it. We can't thank them enough," added Oswald.

The purpose of Adopt a Family is to do just that – adopt the entire family so that no one gets left out. Courtney Morehouse, of Rural Metro Ambulance, adopted another family this year.

"Through Adopt a Family, I get the kind of joy that only comes from helping someone else feel joyful, the satisfaction that I've done a little to make this world a happier place, and the inspiration to keep making a difference. These families might think that we are giving to them, but they have no idea how much they give to us. Adopting a family has given me more holiday joy than I can express."

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For the second year in a row, Lorie Obernauer chose to adopt a family in honor of her friends instead of purchasing them gifts. "Normally, buying gifts for friends and family is a chore but through this program it became a joyful and enriching experience."

Even companies join in the holiday spirit and the staff at Aurora Schools Federal Credit Union raised \$1,200 to adopt several families. Funds were donated by staff members and compiled from a year long wear jeans on Fridays for \$5 campaign. "We chose Adopt a Family because we felt that by keeping our funds and efforts in Arapahoe County we would truly be giving back to the community that we serve, and undoubtedly, students in the Aurora Schools," explained Stacey Foster, ASFCU employee. "Our favorite gift was a snow shovel that an 8 year old boy wished for so he could help his dad shovel snow."

For an Arapahoe County employee, adopting a family means a lot. "I know what it's like – to have a Christmas without gifts. It feels good to help others and I knew our participation in the Adopt a Family program was making an impact when my teenage daughter said, 'Mom, you don't have to give me a gift this year, I'd rather you'd give it to the kids who need it more.'"

Arapahoe County would like to thank all of our donators for their generous spirit and loving hearts. Any individuals, groups or organizations interested in participating in the 2008 Adopt a Family program can call Human Services at 303-636-1150 and leave their information to be contacted in November.

To download photos click on the following link: <ftp://www.co.arapahoe.co.us/Pub/CA/>

Photo captions:

Arapahoe County employee Christine Comer and her daughter Erin volunteered as elves to help organize the mountains of gifts donated to Arapahoe County's Adopt a Family program.

Arapahoe County staff Susan Harman and Lori Oswald along with Jessica Prasser of Convention Designs (middle) pose with Santa and Mrs. Claus at the Adopt a Family Winter Wonderland celebration for needy families.

Stacey Foster drops off the gifts from Aurora Schools Federal Credit Union including a shovel that an 8 year old wished for so that he could shovel snow with his dad.

Rural Metro Ambulance Paramedic Dave Verdeyen and EMT Brian Ranck deliver their gifts in a special ride.

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