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## Tommy Tomlinson XML

Posted on Sun, Dec. 24, 2006

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### IN MY OPINION

## What a Joy: \$83,488 for foster kids

TOMMY TOMLINSON

A few weeks ago I got a call from a guy named Brian King.



He's a co-owner of A M King Construction based in

SouthPark. He had seen a story about Project Joy -- the annual drive where I team up with Mecklenburg County Youth and Family Services to provide Christmas gifts for foster kids.

Brian said his company wanted to donate to Project Joy. "It might not be a big amount for you, but it is for us," he said.

"Well, how much are you talking about?" I said.

"We're thinking about \$25,000," he said.

After I caught my breath, I said: "That's a *big* amount for us."

In fact, it was the biggest single donation in Project Joy's six-year history. And that donation -- along with thousands of others -- helped Project Joy to its best year ever.

As of Friday, the total in cash and gifts comes to \$83,488.

Our previous best year was 2004, when donations totaled \$58,143.

Since 2001, generous folks from this area and beyond have now donated more than \$280,000 to give foster kids a memorable Christmas.

I told you about the \$25,000 donation. We also got a money order in the mail for \$2.60.

Every cent mattered.

And so did every gift. We got rafts of baby dolls, boxes of books, mountains of stuffed animals, racks of wallets and watches, and enough bicycles to fill a conference room.

We used cash donations to buy more. In all, we provided Christmas gifts to more than 1,800 children.

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Because we collected more than usual this year, we have some money left over. Here's how we plan to use it.

We'll set some aside for foster kids who enter the county system in the coming year.

We'll use some to provide care packages for foster kids heading to college in the fall.

And we'll start buying gifts for next year. Our shoppers hit the after-Christmas sales to get the most out of every dollar.

Every year I end up with a longer list of people to thank. Let me try to be quick.

First of all, thanks to the county workers who put in so many long hours working with families.

Next, thanks to the foster parents who do so much good for so many kids.

Most of all, thanks to all the generous contributors who make Project Joy happen. The rest of us are middlemen. You're the stars.

One last story for this year.

When it became clear we were having a good year, we talked about buying small iPods for half a dozen foster kids who have a shot at getting into good music schools.

That's an expensive gift by our standards. But we agreed that in this special case, it was OK.

I went back to the office and about an hour later the phone rang.

"I was thinking about buying some iPods and donating them," the caller said. "Could you use half a dozen?"

That's what happens in Project Joy. And that's why I feel so blessed to be a part of it.

Thanks again. And have a great holiday.

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