Sidney, Shelby County and the Spirit of Giving

By Mike Barhorst

Nobel Prize Recipient Nelson Mandela spent 27 years of his life in prison. He had every reason to be bitter, and yet, wasn’t. “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead,” he once said.

As the year winds to a close, each of us has multiple opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others. Through our respective houses of worship, civic organizations and a number of non-profit organizations, there are multiple opportunities to help make the lives of those around us better.

Last year I had the opportunity to watch the first ever Mark’s Toys for Tots Bike Drive from a unique perspective. At the time, my office was located almost directly across the street from Mark Reedy’s Thrivent Financial office in downtown Piqua.

Mark Reedy’s first bike drive was wildly successful. He hoped to provide bicycles for several dozen children and was able to raise enough money to provide bicycles for every child whose parents met the financial guidelines and requested one – more than 200 new bicycles – a true outpouring of love.

There was one image from that experience that haunts me still. I was standing on the street near the office door talking with a passerby when a young boy pressed his nose against the window and looked inside. One of the bicycles donated for the drive was located in the front window of my office. The young boy turned away from the window, his face hopeful, and asked his mother, “Mommy, would you please sign me up for a bicycle?”

“Absolutely not!” she replied. “No one is ever going to know that I can’t afford to buy you a bicycle – just forget it!” Although I was tempted to say something to the mother, there was something so cold and final in her answer that I decided not to get involved in what I determined, could have only made things worse for the small boy who already had silent tears running down his face as they hurried on their way. I never saw either of them again, but have often wished that I might have known the identity of the boy so that Santa might have personally delivered a bicycle to his home.

The United States Marine Corps League Toys for Tots distributed the bicycles through the Salvation Army, and on the day the parents came to pick up the presents, I can’t tell you the joy that filled the building at 129 South Wayne Street in Piqua as the 201 bikes were loaded into nearly every variety of vehicle by parents from Piqua, Fletcher, Covington and Bradford. The joy radiated from the faces of parents who knew that they too, would be able to give their child a shiny new bicycle on Christmas.

This year, Mark Reedy has brought Mark’s Toys for Tots Bike Drive to our community. The parents of 245 children have met the established guidelines for a shiny new bicycle this Christmas. The bicycles will be delivered in Anna, Botkins, Fort Loramie, Houston, Jackson Center, Kettlersville, Lockington, Port Jefferson, Russia and Sidney and other points within Shelby County.

The average cost of each bicycle is $80.00. Just today, I took the time to sit down and write my personal check. I then walked from City Hall to the Post Office and mail it so that I could meet the deadline for ensuring that every child whose parents signed up for a bicycle will actually receive one.

There are many, many good causes, all worthy of our charitable dollars. It is up to each of us to decide how we can best give back for the many blessings we have received. If you can afford to contribute to this cause, I would encourage you to do so.

I don’t know of a better gift than knowing that one of the 153 kids who reside in our community, perhaps one of our neighbors, will be riding a new bicycle after Christmas – and yes, for those who criticized me for not wearing a helmet when I made the trip down the hill a few weeks ago to publicize this effort – it is my understanding that money has been raised so that each recipient of a new bicycle will also receive a helmet!
If you want to donate, donations of any amount are welcome. Simply mail your contribution to Mark’s Toys for Tots Bike Drive, 429 North Main Street, Piqua, Ohio 45356. So that Mark and his elves can have the bicycles assembled and ready to deliver on time, donations should be made no later than December 15.

Let’s ensure that the reputation that our community has for being a giving community is once again demonstrated through our generosity. And while doing so, remember the words of Nelson Mandela. “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”