

Hamilton Elementary School, Peace Lutheran Church make holiday bright for families in need

Thursday, January 5th, 2012

Thanks to the work of Hamilton Elementary School staff and students and Peace Lutheran Church in Coon Rapids, a number of the school's families had food for the holiday break and presents for their children.

After the Thanksgiving break, Hamilton teachers encouraged students to do chores around the house to raise money to donate items to the school's food drive. In addition to the food donated by staff and students, through the Faith Community Partnership, Peace Lutheran Church donated food for six families.

Started in 2010, the Faith Community Partnership is a collaborative effort of the Anoka Hennepin School District, faith based organizations and broader communities to raise awareness and understanding of community issues, and to mobilize people to meet the basic needs of students.

Karla Williams, Hamilton's social worker, said the members of Peace Lutheran began working with Hamilton about two years ago after Sorteberg Elementary School closed.

"The Sorteberg social worker recommended they partner with us and they have been fabulous," Williams said. "This is such a huge blessing for families."

Peace Lutheran has worked with Anoka-Hennepin schools for about 10 years; long before the Faith Community Partnership became official. One of many schools the church works with, Hamilton families also received food baskets from the church for Thanksgiving. Church members also donate gifts and cold-weather clothing to students.

Williams also had gifts and clothing donated by other members of the community. Three seniors, Dottie, Debbie and Joan, from the Coon Rapids Senior Center, knitted mittens and scarves and collected hats. The Coon Rapids Super Seniors donated socks and underwear for each Hamilton child whose family is receiving a food basket. Area realtors provided gifts for students in need and adopted a family. A former Hamilton employee who now works as a flight attendant donated personal hygiene items.

About 12 families received food baskets and some families received just gifts. The last week school was in session before the eight-day school break, Williams said she was still receiving requests from families in need.

Hamilton principal Diane Merritt said she was with a family member as the woman picked up her holiday gifts.

"I watched the tears flow and heard, as she struggled to speak, the message to please thank those who enabled them to have a Christmas this year," Merritt said. "In tough times like these, the kindness and thoughtfulness of people has a huge impact. A student who is fed and has warm clothes is a stronger learner and better able to meet the day."

"Basic needs have to be met before children can concentrate on their class work. Not only are the gifts from Peace Lutheran tangible and appreciated by the families, it goes beyond that. It helps to restore and renew. They are gifts that keep on giving!"