

Personal touch meaningful to Breckenridge residents

December 16, 2005

Posted: 12/16/05

Bob and Carolyn Holsomback, members of Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Tyler, try out one of the benches they rebuilt for the Breckenridge Village prayer garden. (Photo by Craig Bird)

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By **Craig Bird**

Baptist Child & Family Services

TYLER-At Breckenridge Village, Bob and Carolyn Holsomback are making names-not for themselves but for the residents of the Baptist Child & Family Services facility for mentally handicapped adults. They also have made Christmas gifts, park benches, napkins, bluebird houses-and lots and lots of friends.

After Mrs. Holsomback made stockings for all the residents and staff last December, Development Director Linda Taylor insisted they come to a chapel service and distribute them personally.

"We were amazed at the response," Holsomback remembered. "We had no idea how important it was to have their name on the stocking."

A young man stroked Holsomback's cheek, repeating over and over, "You look just like my granddaddy." Meanwhile, a young woman-usually non-verbal-kept looking back and forth between her stocking and Mrs. Holsomback. As she rubbed her fingers over the stitching, she kept saying, "That's me, that's me."



Carolyn Holsomback makes travel pillows for residents.

This Christmas, the couple from Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Tyler will give away travel pillows—again with each resident's name prominently displayed.

"We were looking for something that would specifically belong to them individually but something that they could use. This way when they are riding in the van or watching television, they can use it," Mrs. Holsomback explained.

"I saw such a need after I first visited. The residents are special—just like the very young and the elderly in that they are so dependent on others to care for them. In our society, we give a lot of attention sometimes to people who don't need it so much, who aren't so dependent. But the more Bob and I are involved here, the more we are convinced that resources invested at Breckenridge get full value for the Lord's money. This is absolutely the best use of donations for God's work."

Such total devotion belies the fact the Holsombacks' association with Breckenridge is only about one year old. The couple only visited the facility in fall 2004 because it was the site for a free concert by one of their favorite singers, Cynthia Clawson.

"That was the first time we ever visited," Mrs. Holsomback recalled. "As usual, Cynthia was wonderful. But we were really touched by what we saw and heard about Breckenridge. We stayed after the concert to take a tour, but there were so many others doing the same that Linda asked us if we could come back another time."

They not only came back three weeks later, but also brought along a cash

contribution. They asked if there were projects they could undertake within their physical limitations and were asked to repair some picnic tables that had seen better days. That was just the starting point.

Mrs. Holsomback noticed Brecken-ridge had to rent tablecloths and napkins for dinners, so she made a supply, along with reversible runners for the tables-green for Christmas functions, maroon for general use. Holsomback took on the task of rebuilding the park benches for the prayer garden, searching for a supply of durable cypress wood. Mrs. Holsomback worried about the rough-cut slats. She warned her husband the Breckenridge residents "would have to wear leather britches to keep from getting splinters in delicate places." He also decided to populate the campus with bluebird houses, both to extend the habitat of the rare bird as well as provide residents with the joy of hearing and seeing them.

Holsomback, the woodworker of the team, has a bad back that limits the sustained physical activity needed to do many maintenance jobs, but his slow and steady pace is efficient. Mrs. Holsomback has severely limited vision but does the sewing.

But they function as a team, literally. When Holsomback was fashioning the park bench slats, she operated the drill press. When Mrs. Holsomback began making the personal travel pillows for the residents and staff for this Christmas, he cut the material.

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