

Amarillo family mobilizes volunteers to bring joy to the forgotten

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AMARILLO—In 1997, Nancy Haning and her daughter Ashley were in a home delivering Christmas presents for underprivileged children when they noticed something that changed their lives.

There was another person in the room—an elderly man who provided care for the children. They realized he needed to be cared for just as much as the children did—but they had nothing to give him.

Nancy Haning (left), who started A Time to Share with her family, delivers a Christmas present to Antoinette Williams. (PHOTO/Kaitlin Warrington/BGCT)

The Hanings—including father Jerry—set out to provide Christmas presents for the elderly as well as the physically challenged throughout Amarillo. It's their way of caring for the "forgotten and overlooked" older people in their community and show them people still care about them.

The Haning family, members of [First Baptist Church in Amarillo](#), researched the needs of the elderly, particularly shut-ins, and launched A Time to Share, a nonprofit organization that mobilizes volunteers to collect, wrap and deliver Christmas presents to the aged each year.

"The people who are living in their homes are lonely," Nancy Haning said. "They love for our volunteers to come, give them a hug, a few gifts. We've

had people say before, 'Actually the visit from the nice family means as much as the nice gifts.'"

The family made its first delivery in 1999, and harnessing the efforts of 70 volunteers, A Time to Share ministered to 151 people that year. Since then, the ministry has continued to grow, now partnering with eight agencies and ministering to more than 1,100 people during Christmas and Easter.

Many of the volunteers are members of First Baptist Church, but others are friends, Girl Scouts and others in the community. A Time to Share leaders never know how many people will volunteer through the organization. They simply trust God to provide the people and donations God would like to see. Jerry Haning admits it's a business plan that would drive bankers crazy, but it works perfectly every year.

"Somehow, that just works out," he said. "Just the right number of people."

People who receive gifts are thankful for people having thought of them, Nancy Haning said. They're excited by the opportunity to visit with someone who is willing to take time to come see them.

The elderly often ask those who deliver the presents to sit next to them while opening the gifts. Others choose to save the gifts and open it Christmas day. Upon one delivery, a man said the A Time to Share presents were the first Christmas gifts he'd had in eight years. Another woman indicated A Time to Share provided her first Christmas presents in 12 years.

"They get as excited as the little kids," Nancy Haning said. "They may not jump up and down. They may not show it outwardly. But they have such great hearts of appreciation."

A Time to Share volunteers many times are as excited to deliver the gifts as people are to receive them. Their enthusiasm is stoked further by their

involvement. They recruit their friends to help with the effort. They share the need to participate in the ministry.

One volunteer noticed when he delivered presents that a house had no heat. That year, he and his family members decided to forego purchasing gifts for each other in order to go back to that house and help the resident get heat for the winter.

"This is especially dear to my heart because it helps the elderly in Amarillo," said Corky Holland, who volunteers at A Time to Share with his family.

"It's folks that are not able to get out and have Christmas themselves. To me, it's a great opportunity to share with those who have given of their lives to many others, friends and family they've had and now are no longer able to do that."

Nancy Haning said the key to the ministry is caring for others as God would like. Every person wants to feel like someone else cares about him, she noted. A Time to Share fills that desire.

"All of us deserve to celebrate Lord Jesus' birthday and his death and resurrection, regardless of what choices we've made or what's gone down with our families," she said. "We're all important to him. Thus we must all be important to each other."

This month, Texas Baptists are discussing ministry to the elderly and shut-ins during Christmas. To join the discussion, visit www.texasbaptists.org/fellowshipall.

Compiled from reporting by Rex Campbell, Dennis Parrish and Kaitlin Warrington.