

Norwin Rotary sends stuffed animals to needy children in India

By Shannon Farr
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The Rotary Club of Norwin has donated stuffed animals to hundreds of poverty-stricken children in India.

Beginning in February, as part of the third annual international project "Gift a Smile," the 87-member Rotary Club of Norwin, along with their friends and other private organizations, joined with the Rotary Club of Rajkot Midtown, India, and Federal Express to donate and ship stuffed animals to the children.

"You should have seen the look on those children's faces when they received their gift. They were dancing with their new stuffed friends. They were so overjoyed," said Dina Denning, owner of Creative Stitches by Dina Inc. in North Huntingdon.

A four-year member of the Norwin Rotary Club, Denning spearheaded "Gift a Smile" and volunteered to box up and store the toys at her business.

FedEx volunteered to ship the goods overseas last week, said Ron Coiner, public relations committee chairman of the Norwin club.

"I came in to work one day and there was a bag on my door full of stuffed animals. I don't even know who they came from," said Denning.

"My place of business was beginning to look like a toy store more than an embroidery company," Denning said. Since the project began in 2004, more and more people have decided to donate gently used and new stuffed animals, she said.

Once a month, Deepak Agrawal, alongside fellow members of the Rotary Club of in the town of Rajkot in the state of Gujarat visit children in a nearby village and talk to their families about hygiene, the importance of having clean water and how to make a better life for themselves, Denning said.

As a reward for the children's patience and attention, they receive a stuffed animal. Over 800 toys were donated, enough to fill 20 large boxes, Denning said.

The stuffed animals are delivered to children in the pediatric ward of the general hospital in India, in slum areas, at Mother Theresa's orphanage and in Midtown Township, a community built for earthquake victims.

While a stuffed animal may be a basic reward from a parent to a child in a wealthier country, many Indian parents could not imagine being able to give their child a teddy bear when they can't even afford rice to feed them, Denning said.

Sally Walls, a FedEx spokeswoman, said the

company cares about the global community and is happy to donate transportation.

"We are very grateful to FedEx and all of the contributors. The Norwin Rotary Club spent over \$5,000 shipping the stuffed animals three years ago," said Jeanne Morrison, president of the Rotary Club of Norwin.

"I joined the Rotary Club to find the humanitarianism in our community, and not only did I find it in our community, I found it a world away," Denning said.