

Santa's Other Elves At Work

Regional Program Aims To Bring Christmas Cheer To Seniors

By NATE DELESLINE III
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Nearly 1,000 central Valley senior citizens will have a merrier Christmas, thanks to the efforts of local volunteers and businesses.

On Thursday, a handful of volunteers worked in a vacant storefront in a shopping center off Port Republic Road to put the finishing touches on gift bags for disadvantaged local seniors.

One by one, they wrapped a variety of simple items — socks, blankets, cooking utensils, soap and body wash, and CDs.

The workers were wrapping up Be A Santa To A

"Most of these seniors don't have [anyone] to come visit them. It's just such a joy to think somebody remembered them."

— JEANNE RUSSELL
HOME INSTEAD, VERONA

See **ELVES**, Page B3



Photos by Justin Falls / DN-R

ABOVE: Volunteer Miriam Martin, from First Choice Home Health, picks out presents as she and her co-workers donate their time Thursday to wrap gifts for disadvantaged seniors. They were taking part in Be A Santa To A Senior, a program organized by Home Instead Senior Care with the help of the United Way. **RIGHT:** Volunteers wrapped and placed gifts in labeled bags.



STATE / VALLEY VIRGINIA

Friday, December 16, 2011 **B3**

About 25 Local Companies Lent Support To Program

Elves

FROM PAGE B1

Senior, a program organized by Home Instead Senior Care and supported by the United Way of Harrisonburg Rockingham County.

Each person enrolled in the program will receive three or four gifts from a wish list submitted in advance through local social service agencies. The gifts will be delivered starting today in bags that were hand-decorated by area students.

Jeanne Russell, director of community relations for Home Instead in Verona, said the program also assists seniors in Augusta and Rockbridge counties.

"We orchestrate the whole thing, but if members of the community didn't decide to adopt people, we wouldn't have gifts," Russell said.

About 25 local companies also lent their support, either with tangible gift donations or through in-kind support.

"Most of these seniors don't have [anyone] to come visit them," she con-



Justin Falls / DN-R

Volunteers from First Choice Home Health Julie Tyson (right) and Holly Willgruber wrap presents and gift cards Thursday.

tinued. "It's just such a joy to think somebody remembered them."

Social workers from the Valley Program for Aging Services, Elkton Area United Services the Salvation Army and other agencies and nonprofits helped make sure each gift bundle had a personal touch.

But in a somber sign of the times, Russell said requests are up for gift cards to buy just the essentials — food,

medicine and warm comfy clothes.

Kristen Eaton, a registered nurse with First Choice Home Health of Harrisonburg, was among Thursday's volunteers.

"Hopefully, I put enough paper on this," Eaton mused while wrapping a coffee mug filled with instant hot chocolate packets.

First Choice adopted two seniors in the program and the entire office staff decided to help wrap gifts instead of exchanging gifts with each other this year.

Kevin Flint, a member of the United Way's community council, said participating in the event has definitely helped him keep the holidays in perspective. And, he acknowledged that it's OK if his wrapping job doesn't look picture-perfect.

For the recipients, "The most important part is ... getting them to a place where they can have fun," Flint said.

Contact Nate Delesline III at 574-6275 or ndelesline@dnronline.com