

News Release

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Freshman learning community plans holiday party

KOKOMO, Ind. — Students in an Indiana University Kokomo freshman learning community are making their list and checking it twice, preparing to play Santa for eight residents of The Walnut House, a Mental Health Association group home.

“This is not just about the holidays,” freshman Lindsie Garrett said. “This is about our class getting to express to someone that people they don’t even know care about them.”

Garrett and Carol Garber, the class instructor, visited the four men and four women, and compiled a list of specific requests, which they are now asking the community to help, to create a “Miracle on Walnut Street.”

“They were just so excited to explain what they wanted,” Garrett said. “They didn’t ask for anything big, and they’re so excited to think about getting exactly what they want.”

The class will have “Miracle Trees,” with each ornament containing one wish, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday, November 19, Tuesday, November 20, and November 26-30, both in the Main Building and Kelley Student Center. Those who want to contribute may take an ornament or two, buy the requested items, and return them to the students. They will take the gifts to the home for a holiday party on Thursday, December 6.

Student Shane Houston said most of them asked for “pretty basic stuff,” as gifts, including a box of Alphabits cereal, licorice, crayons, children’s movies, and other small items most college students would take for granted.

“I think its’ going to be really heartwarming and exciting to see the looks on their faces when we bring them what they want,” he said.

Garber said of all the community service projects her class has completed through the years, this one has been the most touching.

“I’ve done 10 or 12 years of service projects. This is the first one that’s made me cry,” she said. “It’s very humbling meeting people who are so thrilled to receive such small gifts. We want to give them the personal things that will make them feel like someone cares.”

She hopes her students learn they can make a difference in their communities by working together.

“They’re learning to work together as a team, and experiencing the joy of helping someone else,” she said.

Andre Gillard said it is important to him that they are providing gifts to people who might otherwise be forgotten.

“Everyone should have a happy Christmas,” he said. “They are valuable in our community.”

Gillard said the project has been life-changing for him.

“This project has opened my eyes to the needs of others, and made me a kinder person,” he said. “I plan to do things like this on my own for the rest of my life. I want to make a difference in everything my hands touch.”

Lesly Winburn is excited to deliver the gifts.

“These things are going to mean a lot to the residents,” she said. “They don’t have anyone to care about them, so I’m glad we can help.”

The Miracle Tree will have specific sizes and items needed. In general, residents asked for sweat shirts and sweat pants, pajamas, sheet sets, blankets, pillows, lunch boxes, hat, glove and scarf sets, lap blankets, slipper socks and art supplies.

Garber said Kohl’s has donated a \$500 gift card, which students will use to buy each resident a new winter coat.

Anyone who would like to help but cannot visit the Miracle Tree may contact Garber at cagarber@iuk.edu to get a specific gift request to fulfill.

“We appreciate any help we can get to make their holidays a little brighter,” she said. “We want to show our support at a time they are often depressed, lonely, or without the support of their families”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana. -END-