



**Women Helping
Others**

Women Helping Others

(WHO)

2022

In The News

ANNE MARSHALL



WHO members pose before packaging cookies in December.

WHO provides sweet treats for homebound residents

By Linda Dwyer

Who gathers to package baked cookies for homebound seniors and needy families? Women Helping Others, that's who.

WHO members, dressed in their tackiest holiday sweaters, look forward to this annual event each year, where they socialize while putting together the bundled goodies. WHO baked and

packaged the cookies for Holiday Meals Delivered, formerly the Georgetown Christmas Day Program.

Nina Stancil, past president of WHO, said all kinds of cookies were baked.

"We encouraged members, as well as all of Sun City, to bake," she said.

The cookies were laid out on eight 12-foot tables as 50 women

bundled about a dozen cookies into holiday bags at a time. About 375 dozen cookies were distributed.

This effort has been an annual tradition in the Georgetown community for about 25 years. Back in 2010, WHO baked sweet treats for 100 families. This year, Holiday Meals Delivered served 100 seniors from Meals on Wheels and 157 families from The Caring

Place. Recipients received a gift bag consisting of toiletries, a calendar, WHO cookies and gifts. A hot turkey meal was given by The Sheraton Georgetown Hotel and H-E-B provided bread and rolls. Volunteers delivered the meals and goodies to each family.

WHO was formed in 2010 in Sun City, when a dozen women were willing to exchange their weekly lunch-out-with-the-girls for a

brown bag lunch and the chance to make a difference in their local community.

From that small beginning, WHO has evolved to over 300 women strong. Members meet monthly with the goal of advancing the quality of life for others through donations of time, service and financial assistance.

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WHO meets, assists Living Grace Canine Ranch

WOMEN HELPING OTHERS

Anne Marshall

It all started with a dream, a conversation between friends over coffee, and a dozen women willing to exchange their weekly lunch-out-with-the-girls for a brown bag and the chance to make a difference in their local community. It was a small beginning that led to great things.

Women Helping Others, or WHO, has evolved to a force of over 300 women strong, who collectively make a big impact on community-based organizations and improve life for many.

WHO meets monthly — advancing the common good and strengthening quality of life through donations of our time, our service and our financial assistance, while fostering inclusive camaraderie and fellowship.

In spite of the pandemic in 2021, the WHO ladies, in conjunction with other local charitable organizations, raised \$118,800 which helped many in the community.

WHO began 2022 at their January meeting with this year's first recipient of support, Living Grace Canine Ranch, where love resides.

Living Grace Canine Ranch is a Senior Dog Life Care Sanctuary. The 501(c)(3) charity is dedicated to saving, serving and valuing the lives of displaced, unadoptable and unwanted senior canines.

Some of the dog residents at Living Grace are there because their owner has passed away, and some of the dogs were rescued from extreme neglect and abuse. Their facility features separate apartment buildings for small and large dogs. Dogs have access from their living space to play yards and the great outdoors. There is even a medical room and a local vet that assists with dog care when needed and there are two rooms specifically for emergency situations.

It takes a lot of supplies to house, feed, and care for these sweet nines. Once the dogs are accepted at the ranch, they

and a local vet that assists with dog care when needed and there are two rooms specifically for emergency situations.

It takes a lot of supplies to house, feed, and care for these sweet pups. Once the dogs are accepted at the ranch, they are never adopted out.

Today, Living Grace has over 200 compassionate volunteers, fosters awaiting, Parker's Place (memorial garden), a resident Bunkhouse for 20, and two additional resident homes under construction, for a total of 100 senior dogs.

Living Grace has joined with The Delaney in Georgetown to bring their dog, George, as the Delaney's therapy dog for visits with its residents which has had a positive impact on both humans and George.

To donate and learn more about the ranch, visit LivingGraceCanineRanch.org.

Anne Marshall is a member of Woman Helping Others, a Georgetown-based club that works to help area nonprofit organizations. Each month, the group meets to assist and spotlight the efforts of a local nonprofit.

WHO meets, assists Helping Hands of Georgetown

Women Helping Others reported an increase of 70 new members at its February meeting. The group now exceeds the 300 member mark, and has hit the ground running in 2022 by making an impact on those who need assistance in the community.

The members of WHO in February collectively donated enough food that completely filled a large SUV almost to the roof, leaving only the two front seats vacant for the driver and her assistant. The sight was overwhelming.

Helping Hands of Georgetown, a 501(c)3 organization, has been serving the community since 2016. In 2015, this project began as a simple idea and it grew into a very complicated idea before it settled as Helping Hands of Georgetown.

The mission: Helping Hands of Georgetown is connecting with the community to affect positive change in neighborhoods identified as underserved by providing food security and additional social services.

In his hometown of Georgetown, Texas, Robert Weimer — with the help of family, friends, and the city — created a way to empower those slightly less fortunate with the means to grow and succeed. Sometimes they just need a haircut and a



COURTESY OF WOMEN HELPING OTHERS

Helping Hands of Georgetown Executive Director Shasta Thomson stands with Maria Tolleson.

good suit to wear to an interview, and sometimes they need dinner for their young family.

Today their "little group" has grown to serve 600 brown bags a week and a good hot meal every Sunday night. They launched their mobile food pantry in March of 2020, faced with the pandemic, realizing that their friends were going to need more than just a

brown bag meal. So, Helping Hands are now serving 100 pantry bags each week throughout Georgetown.

Whatever the need, they hope to find a way with help. This is a non-profit that began with heart and

it will grow with Heart.

Founder Robert Weimer and his wife, Ellen, recently retired. His successor is Shasta Thomson, the new executive director. For more information about Helping Hands of Georgetown visit their website info@helpinghandsgtx.org.

WHO is also sponsoring a Pot of Gold Fundraiser for the benefit of Brookwood in Georgetown (BiG) Wednesday, March 16, at Mulligan's

patio in Sun City from 5-7 p.m. There is a \$10 cover charge and Twin Oaks Band will be performing. Erin Kiltz is the founder and executive director of BiG.

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WHO supports The Women's Storybook Project of Texas

What a busy month the members of Women Helping Others

have had. On March 16 a third Anne Marshall party fundraiser and pie

auction was held at Mulligan's Restaurant in Sun City for the benefit of BiG, Brookwood in Georgetown. The fundraiser enabled them to purchase a much needed refrigerator for the pies that they make and sell. The pie auction raised \$750 in addition to \$3,540 in donations. Music was provided by The Twin Oaks Band and a great time was had by all.

At the monthly WHO meeting, the club received a presentation by Jill Gonzalez, executive director of The Women's Storybook Project of Texas, which is a women's prison program that connects children with their incarcerated mothers through the joy of literature. The primary goal of WSP is to reduce the rate of reincarceration among incarcerated mothers by strengthening the mother-child connection

through literature. This literature project requires volunteers to travel to Texas female prisons to record incarcerated mothers as they read stories to their children. These recordings

provide a chance for children to hear their mother's voice while they are away. Connecting the children and mothers helps provide a reason for the mothers to work hard not to return to prison.

Since 2003, Women's Storybook Project has recorded over 19,000 mothers reading stories for their children and mailed out over 40,000 books and recordings across Texas and the country. The direct beneficiaries per year are over 3,600 children receiving packages from their moms containing messages of love and recordings of bedtime stories.

The geographic area served is Central and East Texas and Houston. Jill Gonzalez shared with the club the most popular book that the moms read to their children "The Invisible String"

by Patrice Karst which has sold over a million copies.

Earlier this year WHO donated \$1,500 to WPS for computers and at the meeting they were presented with a check for \$500. For more information about WSP their website is www.storybookproject.org.

A spring fundraising event is the Sip & Shop, which will be held on April 23 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Lakeside Pavilion in Marble Falls for a fun afternoon of food, drinks, a fashion show experience, a swag bag, the chance to win amazing door prizes, and much more—all while supporting Meals on Wheels of Williamson & Burnet Counties. The fashion models will be members of Women Helping Others. All are invited to participate. Visit OWBC-TX.org for tickets.

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Jill Gonzalez, executive director of The Women's Storybook Project of Texas, meets with WHO Vice President Maria Tolleson in March.

WHO has busy, productive April

CASA, The Caring Place, and BiG receive donations

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Women Helping Others celebrated the month of April with several wonderful events.

As a result of the March Pot of Gold fundraiser for BiG, the organization was able to purchase a special refrigerator to hold and display the wonderful pies that are made and sold at the BiG restaurant in Georgetown.

WHO's Vice President Maria Tolleson, together with three other ladies from WHO, also met with the executive director of The Caring Place, Ginna O'Connor and presented her with a donation of \$1,000. The ladies were taken on a tour of The Caring Place and were amazed to learn about the incredible services that are provided to the community in Williamson County. It is a great place to shop for many items from clothing to household goods.

At their monthly meeting, the members were given a presentation by Wendy Prindle, community engagement coordinator of CASA of Williamson County. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children.



WHO Vice President Maria Tolleson (left) meets with Wendy Prindle of CASA.

The idea of CASA began in 1977, when Judge David Soukup in Seattle decided he needed to know more about the children whose lives were in his hands. His solution was to ask community volunteers to act as a "voice in court" for abused and neglected children.

These Court Appointed Special Advocate provided him with the detailed information he needed to safeguard the children's best interests and ensure that they were placed in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. The program was so successful that it was duplicated around the nation.

CASA has continued to serve abused and neglected children in Texas for almost 40 years, providing trained community volunteers

for every child who was assigned to the program through the court.

CASA of Williamson County became its own nonprofit organization, self-governed by a volunteer board of directors, in May 2009.

The mission of CASA of Williamson County exists to empower community volunteers to advocate for children who have experienced abuse or neglect to find loving, safe and permanent homes. And their vision is that all children in Williamson County will have loving, safe and permanent homes.

Imagine the experience of children who are removed from their homes because the people responsible for protecting them

have not. These children find themselves in a world filled with social workers, lawyers, judges, and courtrooms where life-altering decisions are made on their behalf. Last year, CASA helped children from 2 days old to 18 years old.

During the meeting, a donation from WHO of \$500 was presented to Wendy Prindle for CASA.

Donations to CASA may be made online at www.williamsoncountycasa.org/giving.

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Meet Laundry Love of Georgetown

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One day somebody asked a homeless person named Eric, "Hey man, what can we do for you? What would make a huge impact on your life?"

Eric thought about it and replied, "If I had clean clothes, I think people would treat me like a human being."

That is a true story and Eric's comment about being disrespected was the impetus to start the very first Laundry Love in 2003.

Today there are hundreds of Laundry Loves across the country, donating money and detergent for people to wash their clothes and bedding for free.

Leslie Hearne, director of Laundry Love, pointed out that the Georgetown chapter of the organization is different. They are not in the business of providing quarters and detergent and a meal twice a month to people who otherwise couldn't afford to do their laundry. They are in the business of empowering people, lifting their self-esteem, restoring their dignity and, as their homeless friend Eric



Leslie Hearne, director of Laundry Love of Georgetown, receives a \$500 donation from WHO, represented by Vice President Maria Tolleson.

suggested, recognizing their value. They are in the business of inspiring confidence and helping those they serve fully participate in life and be accepted in the community.

During a typical Laundry Love evening, people show up throughout the evening. There is no registration, no proof of need, no strings attached. Everybody is welcome. Volunteers are ready to serve.

When the event begins, clothes and bedding are loaded into washing machines. When they are ready, enough quarters and

detergent pods are distributed to wash and dry each load.

Once everybody is settled, waiting for their cycle to finish, a meal is served. Then they visit with Laundry Love volunteers and staff.

At Laundry Love Georgetown, strangers become friends, people are known by name, hope is hustled, and the worth of every human being is acknowledged and celebrated.

Laundry Love Georgetown has a simple and very clear mission to provide free laundry service in a

friendly and respectful environment to lift self-esteem, restore dignity, and contribute to the health and hygiene which comes from wearing clean clothes.

For hundreds of families in Georgetown, Laundry Love offers some financial relief, so families don't have to make some tough decisions. Fill up the gas tank or do laundry. Buy groceries or do laundry. Pay the electric bill or do laundry.

About 10,000 pounds of laundry is washed every month. The days of washing clothes with four quarters are long gone. To wash and dry one large load of laundry costs \$7.50.

Laundry Love hosts events on the second Tuesday of each month at Mr. Laundry, 203 Thousand Oaks, Georgetown from 4-8 p.m. and on the last Thursday of each month at Washatopia, 1910 South Austin Avenue, Georgetown.

Laundry Love spends \$1,200 a month at the laundromats to nurture the human spirit of our neighbors. Women Helping Others donated \$500 to the cause in May.

Anne Marshall is a member of Woman Helping Others, a Georgetown-based club that works to help area nonprofit organizations.

WHO supports Christ Child Society with donations

“Nothing is ever too much to do for a child,” **WOMEN HELPING OTHERS**

Mary Virginia Merrick, founder of the Christ Child Society, said in 1887.

Today the movement that Mary Virginia Merrick began over 125 years ago has become a federation of 44 chapters with a membership of over 6,000 volunteers, organized to meet the contemporary needs of America's neediest families.

The Christ Child Society of Texas, Capital Area, Inc., is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization open to members of all faiths. The motive and spirit is a love for the Christ Child, expressed in fellowship and service to our community's youth who are most in need of spiritual, physical, emotional, or economic support, regardless of race or creed.

Nationwide, all Christ Child chapters have a common service project of providing layettes to mothers of newborns in need. In addition, each chapter responds to the unique needs within its own community. Capital Area members provide bereavement gowns, hygiene packets for disadvantaged elementary students and for homeless middle school and high school students, and caps and gloves to elementary school students in need.

At the Women Helping Others June meeting, Meg Beasley, president of the local Christ Child Society of Texas chapter, showed the members of WHO some of the beautiful handmade items made by the volunteers.

The generosity of the WHO membership showed. The WHO la-



Meg Beasley, president of The Christ Child Society of Texas, Capital Area, Inc., receives a donation of \$500 from WHO Vice President Maria

dies brought enough supplies of diapers for infants and toiletries for older children which filled two automobiles with their donations. At the meeting, WHO Vice President Maria Tolleson presented a donation of \$500 to the Christ Child Society of Texas, Capital Area, Inc.

The WHO ladies are at it again with two new and exciting events in the works. The first event is WHO is sponsoring an annual fundraiser to benefit Sun City and Georgetown seniors served by Meals on Wheels of Williamson & Burnet Counties and Madella Hilliard Senior Center in Georgetown. The fundraiser is open July 20th through October 26.

The second big fundraiser event

is a Sock Hop currently in the planning stages, which will take place on October 1 for the benefit of The Georgetown Project - The Nest serving students who are at-risk, homeless or living in transition and enrolled/attending a Georgetown ISD high school. The Sock Hop will take the participants back to the 1950's with poodle skirts and polka dots and lots of fun.

More information about these two events will be forthcoming.

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Inspired by Charlie Brown, nonprofit helps local kids in need

The Linus Connection is a Central Texas 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to make and deliver hand-made security blankets for children in crisis situations in the Central Texas area. Their blankets go to children in hospital emergency rooms, crisis centers, foster care, shelters and to any child who is in need of a little extra security in their lives.

They recently donated over 180 blankets to the students at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

Each blanket comes with a message to the recipient on a card attached to the blanket.

"This blanket grew out of the love I want to share with you. I hope it will keep you warm, and befriend you late at night. I hope you'll come to love it and be comforted by its sight. Let this blanket wrap you in friendship, and cover you in love. Because this blanket was thinking of you long before it was even done."

There are many children out there who don't have security in their lives. As long as there is a hurting child in a hospital, protective custody or a shelter, The Linus Connection has a job to do.

Women Helping Others presented a donation of \$500 to this wonderful organization. More information about this organization and their volunteer and donation opportunities may be found on their website at TheLinusConnection.org.

WHO helps Meals on Wheels

The Women Helping Others, Meals on Wheels annual fundraiser benefiting Sun

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Stephanie Sabatini, executive director of The Linus Connection, accepts a check from Women Helping Others Vice President Maria Tolleson.

City and Georgetown clients served by Madella Hilliard Senior Center in Georgetown kicked off at the WHO monthly meeting. The program enables seniors to remain living independently for as long as possible.

Meals are delivered by caring volunteers that offer a human connection for seniors who are often isolated and lonely. These volunteers also provide a daily wellness check and can alert staff and caregivers to any concerns they may have.

Some facts – 97 percent of seniors reported making better nutritional choices as a result of the program; 93 percent report being able to stay in their homes longer; and 94 percent feel more secure in their homes due to volunteer visits. Roughly 80 percent of Meals on Wheels

clients are women in their late 70s and early 80s.

There will be a final celebration at Mulligan's in Sun City on October 26 from 5-7 p.m. Nels Johnson, owner of Mulligan's will again donate the uses of the restaurant and patio for people to come have dinner and contribute by donating a \$10 cover charge per person. All contributions for this evening will go directly to Meals on Wheels. Executive Director Marco Cruz and his senior staff will be in attendance.

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WHO sponsors NEST Empowerment Center fundraiser

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Women Helping Others were honored to have a presentation given at their August meeting about The NEST Empowerment Center at the Georgetown Project, which is a safe haven

after the bell rings that offers basic needs, counseling, academic and enrichment support for GISD high school students who are homeless, at-risk or living in transition.

NEST stands for "Nurturing, Empowering, Supporting for Tomorrow."

In November 2011, following about five years of studying the issue of homelessness in GISD, The Georgetown Project opened The Nest as a drop-in day center for homeless teens in GISD.

The vision of The Nest is a community where no child is hungry, hurt, alone or rejected, and where all children and youth believe they are loved, respected and treated with dignity.

After school, students are transported by bus to The Nest for resources such as evening meals, a quiet place for homework, school

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Invitation to the Sock Hop

October 1, 7-10 p.m.
Sun City Ballroom, 2 Texas
Drive
\$25 per ticket.

This fundraiser event benefiting The Nest Empowerment

This fundraiser event benefiting The Nest Empowerment Center in Georgetown is a reserved table seating event with 1950s-1960s music provided by a DJ and a dance and hula hoop contest. Additional activities will take place. The ticket includes a Sonic hot dog and ice tea from Sonic. There will be other retro treats available at minimal cost, so please bring cash. Open to both residents and non residents. Tickets may be purchased at www.sctexas.org and scroll down to "Tickets."

supplies, homework help, job readiness training, connection to community resources and other supportive, therapeutic and enrichment services provided in a positive environment by caring adults.

Community service opportunities are offered weekly during the calendar school year to GISD high school students. There is a 100 percent graduation rate from high school with students who use the The Nest program. The Nest also offers a summer employment program and The Georgetown Project recruits kids for intern jobs where they are paid a salary.

A member of WHO, Carolyn Rowland has been volunteering at The Nest for one year and has been teaching an art class for the children.

Women Helping Others will be sponsoring a Sock Hop fundraiser/dance — Hop in the Nest — on October 1. The artwork created by the students will be live auctioned at the event with all proceeds going to The Nest Empowerment Center.

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WHO supports Friends of the Williamson County Child Welfare Board

THE efforts of Women Helping Others were directed toward the Friends of the Williamson County Child Welfare Board in September. WHO members learned about the Friends group and made a donation to the cause.

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Friends of the Williamson County Child Welfare Board is a nonprofit organization devoted to helping supply the needs of Williamson County children in foster care and their families, as well as the workers who support them. As a supporter of the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards, the group's ultimate goal is to stop child abuse and protect Texas children.

There are approximately 215 Williamson County children involved in the foster care system. In conjunction with the Williamson County Commissioners Court, the Child Welfare Board works to ensure children's basic needs are met through regular clothing allowances, medical and therapeutic interventions, and other resources that would not otherwise be available to them.

Through generous donations, The Friends of the Williamson County Child Welfare Board are able to go beyond basic needs and provide children in foster care items not covered by the state or county.

This year, they have been able to send several children to summer camps, provide graduation items such as caps and gowns, award college scholarships and provide ongoing support to young people in college by providing a monthly allowance.

The board strives to support those who care for children in foster care. Support is provided to both family members caring for their relative children as well as citizens who open up their home to a foster child. Additionally, they help relative caregivers working to become licensed foster or adoptive parents.

These workers are on the front lines — they are the first line of defense for the children in need. The organization helps fund additional training for workers to attend specialized workshops and conferences.

A Rainbow Room is an emergency resource center available to Child Protective Services caseworkers to help them meet the critical needs of the children. It consists of a store-like setting



Board member Jami Nelson, Chairperson Kim Gibbons and Women Helping Others Vice President Maria Tolleson.

that allows CPS workers to go "shopping" for the children and families on their caseloads.

The room is stocked with new items such as clothing, shoes, toys and games, diapers, formula, school supplies, backpacks, hygiene products and cleaning products. Every item in the Rainbow Room is donated or purchased from donations. They have an Amazon wish list can be found here: <https://a.co/i17R4Ta>

Community outreach for the program includes educating the community on the needs of children and child welfare policies, programs and needs. They encourage community and individual involvement in child welfare.

They work with CPS workers to identify gaps in children's services and find the resources to fill them, monitor services to children in the community, stimulate reporting of child abuse and ne-

glect and work for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Children in foster care should have the same opportunities and support as other children.

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From left, Carrie Barry, director of senior nutrition with Meals on Wheels, Executive Director Marco Cruz and WHO Vice President Maria Tolleson.

WHO raises funds for Opportunities for Williamson and Burnet Counties

Women Helping Others again have had a busy October, beginning with the Sock Hop fundraiser for The Nest Empowerment Center – The Georgetown Project, which serves students who are at-risk, homeless or living in transition and enrolled and attending a Georgetown ISD high school. The event was a great success, raising \$10,565.

WHO ladies have also been working hard on the organization's annual fundraiser, which benefits Sun City and Georgetown's senior clients of Opportunities for Williamson and Burnet Counties.

Opportunities for Williamson and Burnet Counties is the area's official Community Action Agency. The group administers social service and economic opportunity programs, including Meals on Wheels and Head Start. The programs and services provided by the community services department help transition low-income community members out of poverty through financial assistance, education and coaching.

What makes Opportunities special is that the group never

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says "no" to feeding a person in need. Some other counties in Texas that have this program have to turn people away due to inability to serve all requests at certain times of the year. It is hard to imagine turning an individual down for a meal when they are hungry.

The local Meals on Wheels program for seniors was established by the 1965 Older American Act, Nutritional Program. This act helped seniors remain living independently for as long as possible. Income is not a program requirement to be eligible. Seniors are also welcome to participate for short term meals when major recovery from surgery is required. The home deliveries of meals are made up 40 percent of volunteers that help with this service.

One great feature of this program is that every recipient receives a daily wellness check when the meal is delivered to their home.

Meals on Wheels prides itself on not having a waitlist for services over the past 10 years.

The three-month fundraiser ends in October, but so far the ladies have raised \$34,600, plus

matching funds from St. David's Foundation up to \$35,000, making the total \$69,600.

The final event of the month will be held at Mulligans Restaurant in Sun City. Nels Johnson, owner of Mulligans, will again donate the use of the restaurant and patio for people to come have dinner and contribute by donating a \$10 cover charge. Executive Director Marco Cruz and his senior staff will be in attendance.

Last year there were 800 children in the Head Start program and each child received a book and a blanket for Christmas. True story: One day during the Christmas season, when hygiene kits were being handed out to families, a little boy got his and he looked in the bag and saw that there was a toothbrush.

He asked, "Does that mean I don't have to share a toothbrush anymore?"

To donate, go to www.OWBC-tx.org and click "Donate."

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Stacy Johnson shares her nonprofit's story

The Women Helping Others ladies had a very special speaker at their November meeting. The group was honored to support the Central Texas Table of Grace and learn about founder Stacy

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Johnson's story.

Anne Marshall

Established in 2014, Central Texas Table of Grace was formed by Ms. Johnson, a former foster child, who recognized the need for a local temporary shelter for displaced children.

Headquartered in Round Rock, the nonprofit was conceived and organized to address the social, intellectual and recreational needs of Texas' displaced youth, and to assist in the successful transition to life in a positive environment.

The mission is accomplished by addressing the critical need of emergency housing and care for displaced children and youth through local initiatives and targeted outreach programming.

The organization is dedicated to helping each child reach his or her individual potential by encouraging wholesome habits such as perseverance, focusing on goals and personal responsibility. They demonstrate a passionate commitment to excellence.

In 2021, their mission to help foster youth expanded to include people who age out of foster care. The Grace365 Supervised Independent Living program launched and is one of only three in the Austin area. It is the only one in Round Rock.

Ms. Johnson was a foster kid, but said she tries to refrain from using that label because it has such a negative connotation.

"The first thing people say when I share that detail of my past is, 'You turned out great for being a foster kid,' " she said. "I wish we could just get rid of the label altogether."

She said she bounced from one home to another from the time she went into the system at the age of 2 until she turned 13. At that point, she asked her social worker if she could be placed in a group home. Despite the social worker describing a group home as feeling like a jail,

she made the move.

"I knew that if I went into a staff-run facility, I would be able to stay there as long as I followed the rules and did what I was told," she said. "In my experience in foster homes, it was just too easy to get replaced if the foster family had a life event that affected their ability to care for extra children."

At the group home, she said there were a lot of rules. Residents were required to attend mandatory therapy sessions daily and had little or no contact with the outside world. However, there were people there to help her.

She had made it a personal goal to get legally emancipated, and with the help of staff she achieved that and went off to live on her own at age 16.

"I expressed this [goal] to the group home therapist and he believed in me," she said. "I attribute the achievement of my first major life goal to a few defining moments."

The first was meeting that group home therapist who believed in me and taught me so much."

"Achieving a monumental goal despite all odds gave so much back to me that I had lost in the shuffle from home to home. Always an outsider and never cared for properly, I lost my self-worth. But someone believed in me, then I believed in me and I achieved what I had set out to do."

She said through the experience — as well as gleaming inspiration from the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and support from Soroptimists — she found herself, her strength and a happy place, and was able to move into her own apartment.

"I want to help create more stories like mine and prevent the all-too-common story and stereotype of 'The Foster Kid,'" she said.

Donations may be made at the Central Texas Table of Grace website at cctxtableofgrace.org.

The giving spirit of Georgetown

Georgetown is noted for its "Most Beautiful Town Square," but what about its giving spirit? Holiday Meals Delivered, formally the Georgetown Christmas Day Program, has been a "giving" community activity for about 25 years.

In 2022, as in the past, some members from Women Helping Others assisted with the program. WHO initiated toiletries drives, promoted cookie baking and packaging drives, donated gift cards and provided drivers for Christmas morning deliveries.

About the program: The late Joann Ford — Ford Elementary School was named in her honor — started what is known today as Holiday Meals Delivered in 1997 to give seniors in need a hot Christmas dinner, a small gift and other donated items. She solicited the services of many Georgetown volunteers.

In these early years, meals were cooked in various church kitchens. Rusty and Lael Winkstein from The Monument Café were volunteers in these kitchens. In 1999, the Winksteins started the Community Christmas Dinners, where their three daughters, friends and café team members volunteered their time to cook and serve a no cost meal to anyone who showed up to the café on Christmas Day. It was their way to make sure their girls experienced the joy and honor in serving others. They may have moaned and groaned a little at getting up early to work at the café, but after the first year it was solidly part of their family Christmas tradition.

In 2005, Beth Jenkins asked them to prepare the meals for the HMD program. This continued until Christmas of 2019.

Ms. Jenkins, president of Pilot's Choice Aviation, Inc., and her dad started as drivers for this program in 2000. In 2005, she took over the responsibility to contin-



Holiday Meals Delivered organizer Beth Jenkins stands with the Sheraton in Georgetown's chef Robert Felios.

ue this program. Under her leadership, it has grown from 50 or so senior families to serving over 260 families.

As this program has grown, the philosophy has not changed. Joann Ford saw a need, carried it out and today many families benefit from this simple act of caring and giving.

In 2022, a record 435 families were served, with 1,500 hot meals prepared. About 500 children, their parents and 131 seniors received gifts. About 300 gallon bags of toiletries, 500 dozen cookies and other items were donated. And 450 volunteers participated.

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In 2020, the Sheraton in Georgetown took over the task of preparing the meals. Chef Robert Felios has a long history of loving food. This love for food took him along a journey for the last 27 years that he never thought possible to different cities and states to hotel chains and different cuisine. One of the things he most loves about food is you will never know it all; just when you think you have it down something new comes out.

His mother, Geri Felios, has always worked in nonprofit organi-

zations. She has such a big heart for those in need and it rubbed off on him. When presented with the opportunity for Sheraton to cook and help those in need he couldn't turn it down. He knows the need is high during the holidays for those that are less fortunate. And what better way than to reach out and lift people up with the love of food? This will be the third year that Sheraton has prepared the meals for Holiday Meals Delivered, and he hopes that this opportunity continues for many years down the road.

Thank you to Georgetown volunteers, people like Beth Jenkins who help keep the program going, and businesses and organizations who donate time, money, items and kindness to Holiday Meals Delivered like Monument Café, Blue Santa, Meals on Wheels, Georgetown ISD, The Caring Place, Sheraton in Georgetown, H-E-B, IKEA, The Round Rock Service Center, Fredrickson Ranch in Georgetown and so many others.

We may not have it all together, but together we have it all! Thank you Georgetown.

Anne Marshall is a member of Woman Helping Others, a Sun City and Georgetown-based club that works to help area nonprofit organizations.

WOMEN HELPING OTHERS

Anne Marshall

