

'My Little Angel' toy drive to honor memory of children

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Paying tribute to the memory of children who are no longer living, the My Little Angel toy drive is being launched for the holiday season in Holyoke.

Initiated by Brett and Josie Murray, the drive's purpose is twofold. First, the drive will raise funds to give toys to local children, working with Phillips County Department of Social Services, as well as Zion Lutheran Church.

Secondly, the idea was generated by the Murrays as a way to remember their infant son Ethan, who was born and died Jan. 29 of this year.

Recognizing others have lost children in the past year and even decades ago, the Murrays see the toy drive as a way to help others who still feel the void of their child's early death. Anyone who has lost a child and would like to have them remembered as part of the My Little Angel project is encouraged to be included.

In fact, not only parents are encouraged to share names of their lost young ones, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as cousins.

Also on board in the My Little Angel toy drive effort are Paula Strobe, in memory of her son Justin; and Lucas and Shannon Schlachter, in memory of daughter Marie.

Josie Murray said she and her husband Brett started looking at allocating a certain amount of money for each of their children for Christmas gifts. Along with their young sons Stephen, Matthew and David, they included baby Ethan, who died the day he was born last January.

"That's how it started," said Josie, noting they decided to include others who have suffered the same kind of painful loss of a child.

Further involving the community, the Murrays are planning a raffle to raise money to buy the toys for the community drive. Rather than simply ask for donations, the toy drive project will feature prizes for those who donate. Among those will be club level tickets to a Nuggets basketball game.

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Dennis Oliver has been working with the Murrays to help set up the toy drive.

Josie said they're hoping to make the toy gifts more personal. For instance, rather than have just a gender and age, they hope to also have preferences such as "likes Spiderman, Transformers or Barbie dolls or whatever the child's personal interests might be.

Additionally, the Murrays plan to set up donation jars in businesses in the community who would like to be involved. Josie emphasized how quickly the total can multiply when people simply donate the coins from their change returned on a purchase.

At this stage of the toy drive, the Murrays are looking for names to be included in the memory portion of My Little Angels. They emphasize while the loss might have occurred 30 or more years ago, it is still a loss as much as the ones that occurred just this year.

Those who have a child, grandchild, niece, nephew or cousin to be mentioned in the memorial toy drive should contact Josie Murray at 970-595-0895 or josie@brettamurray.com; or Paula Strode at 854-3853 or Shannon and Lucas Schlachter at 854-5333.

Businesses willing to set up donation jars for change should also contact one of these people.

My Little Angel toy drive is an effort to unite not only the community, but families who have suffered similar losses in their lives.