

Memorial keeps children in toys

By Janet C. Wetzel
Enquirer contributor

When Rada Simms and Deana Metcalf lost a loved one, they knew no amount of flowers would ease their pain.

So they decided to carry on the legacy of caring started by that loved one, Michael Jason Tucker. They asked mourners to bring toys for needy children to his funeral, not flowers.

Tucker, 24, Simms' son and Metcalf's brother, died in December 2002 from injuries caused by a car wreck.

Family members said he was loving and liked helping people, from family friends to stranded motorists. He worried about the needy, especially children. At Christmas he took children's names from Giving Trees and sponsored needy families. He didn't just buy token gifts. He stood in line to buy the season's hottest toys. If a child needed shoes, he bought the latest styles.

The women donated the piles of toys brought to his funeral to Friends of the Children, Cincin-

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nati, and established the Michael Jason Tucker Memorial program.

In recent weeks, Simms' father, James Hargett, also died. The memorial was dear to her father's heart. He saved his change year round to buy Christmas bicycles he gave to the memorial. When he died, the family's request for toys instead of flowers brought an overwhelming response.

"This is something I did with my son, and I feel a need to continue," said Simms, 56, who lives in West Chester with her husband, Walter. "This is not just to help children. It's also a memorial to my son and now my dad."

She and Metcalf, 37, have a history of giving. They volunteer at their church, Bethany Baptist, and work on the memorial year around. They run ads, make up fliers, shop post-Christmas sales, put buckets for cash and barrels for toy donations in businesses. Metcalf shops garage sales and asks



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Rada Simms (left) and her daughter, Deana Metcalf, with some of the gifts the two have collected to give out to children over the holidays.

the sellers to donate leftover items to the memorial. She has a huge spring garage sale for money to buy more gifts.

Each year they collect and buy hundreds of toys such as dolls, bikes, scooters, plus coats and hats. Most go to Friends of the Children, but some gifts and money, part of which comes from the family, are used to help needy local families.

"When we think of Rada and Deana, angels is what comes to mind because they've done so much to support our children," said Barbara Manuel, Friends of the Children director.

Metcalf, who lives in Liberty

Township with her husband, Tim, and two children said, "This is not about us. We just felt this is what the Lord wanted us to do. We see pictures of the happy faces of kids getting the gifts, and that means so much. Through all our tragedies and many family health problems, the Lord has carried us through, and helps us continue this."

Make donations to the Michael Jason Tucker fund at any First Financial Bank in November and December, or call 513-863-5225.

Do you know a Hometown Hero? E-mail Janet Wetzel at jjwetzel@fuse.net, or fax to 513-755-4150.