

Kids In Need Organization Helps Somerset Families

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Somerset Co. Correspondent
ROCKWOOD (Somerset Co.)
—From birth through age 18, kids in Somerset County won't be denied medical treatment if an organization called Kids In Need can help it.

Kids in Need (KIN) was started more than five years ago by a compassionate man called Charles "Bill" Gary of Rockwood. Gary says he wanted to do more for children of Somerset County so that none of them would be denied needed medical treatment from lack of finances.

A devastating event inspired Gary to begin the program. The day had begun innocently enough when two families visited together. The husbands headed for the woods. The wives talked while their three pre-schoolers romped happily in the nearby cemetery.

When the mothers were summoned by the one girl, they rushed to the scene. A tombstone had toppled on the 4-year-old girl. With unbelievable strength of superhuman proportions, the visiting friend raised the massive

tombstone high enough so the child's mother could pull her free. Gary says that later, other men returned to the scene, pitting their strength against the grave marker. They failed. The tombstone was reported to weigh more than 600 pounds.

"It was the most pitiful thing I've seen," said Gary who drove the family to the hospital.

Following her arrival at a local hospital by ambulance, the child was life-flighted to a Pittsburgh hospital. Her life was miraculously spared, but months of treatment and therapy depleted family finances.

Gary says there was an outpouring of compassion by the community. "They emptied their pocketbooks," he said. He, himself, coordinated a benefit by convincing deer hunters to donate the deer hides to sell for more money for the child's medical bills, which were soaring.

That experience got Bill Gary moving. He started to organize Kids In Need. The community joined the effort. A lawyer acquaintance contacted Harris-

burg and donated his time to learn how to register a new organization like KIN. A local insurance company paid the registration fee.

"Everytime we hit a snag," said Gary, "The Lord moved in and worked it out."

Ultimately, a board of directors was appointed during a public meeting. Kids In Need became an entity. Its fund raising committee works as a separate body.

Jolinda Shaffer of Rockwood is the treasurer. She says that children who are suffering from a wide variety of ills have had medical bills paid through KIN funding. Heart disease, Wilson's Disease, cancer, broken bones, ear infections, and dental work — you name it — KIN will help to fix it.

In screening applicants, KIN allows a 25 percent higher income eligibility than does the government assistance program, says Shaffer. She says that certain cases are given special consideration regardless of income if there is a request for aid. Applicants must provide proof of income by submitting recent paystubs and federal tax forms.

Shaffer says the children enjoy showing their gratitude after being helped by KIN. "Tonight two little girls called me," she said. "They have never seen a dentist. They called me and said, 'Thank you for letting me see the dentist.'"

There is the matter of accountability. Shaffer says donations are generally made by check but on rare occasions when cash is exchanged, three KIN representatives are present.

KIN fundraisers are popular events in Somerset County. Most are held annually, such as the sale of the deer hides during hunting season and which continues to bring in several thousand dollars. Some years the total has yielded \$5,000 for KIN.

More recently, a motorcycle club developed a new benefit for KIN called "Poker Run". It is an all day bike run. This year the course streaked through portions of three states including Southwestern PA. Concluding at Somerset in the evening, the "poker hands" were then drawn for some terrific prizes. Lots of food was available and a band played dance music.

Terry Meneer, from the Laurel Mountain Chapter Harley Owners Group, says the club has a reputation. It is called "The Ice Cream Club," so dubbed because it prohibits alcoholic beverages at its functions.

Then there was the KIN benefit bake sale this year at the Somerset County Fair in August which grossed \$576. This event was a first timer when the fair's baked entries were sold.

Neighbor eyed neighbor as the caloric fare was auctioned off, each wanting to see who was buying what and for how much. Onlookers strained to see whether bidders were fat, thin, or in between.

Dwight "Butch" Lepley of

Meysdale, a big bear of a man, didn't seem "to give a fig" for the teasing he got. He was off and running in no time. By the end, he was the spender of the day with a total tab to pay of \$160 for his baked possessions. He flattered his secretary by unflinchingly spending \$29 on her blue ribbon entry, then waited around to bid for the "Best of Show." It was a fully decorated tempting burnt sugar layer cake. Lepley's opponent for it drove on. Lepley stood his ground, matching and raising the bid according to the call of the auctioneer. When the figure reached three digits the opponent surrendered to the relentless Lepley who then owned the \$100 cake.

Asked why he was willing to spend so much money on a few little baked goodies, Lepley replied with a laugh, "Basically, for Kids In Need. I don't need the cake."

Butch gave away most of his purchases to the volunteer firemen who were manning a food booth. He donated the prize cake to the fair office where many folks got to sample its goodness.

There are many like Butch Lepley supporting KIN. Some \$20,000 is raised annually for this organization, according to Shaffer. Civic groups, churches, and individuals, contribute to the success of the all volunteer organization. In conjunction with a local resort, an annual chicken barbecue is held for KIN. There is a Kiss-A-Pig contest in which locals show wonderful sportsmanship by getting involved for the cause. These represent only a few of the ideas used to support the KIN ideal.

Bill Gary accepts no praise for his noble efforts that are making life better for so many children.

"I don't want credit," he says. "The people keep it going."



These Kids-In-Need supporters do not want credit for helping raise \$20,000 annually to help provide medical treatment for kids in Somerset County.

Borderline Spinners

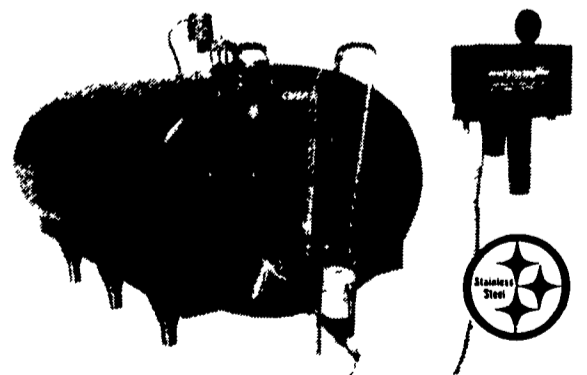
A new monthly spinning guild, the Borderline Spinners, has been formed. Any spinners from the Southern Pennsylvania/Northern Maryland area are invited to

become members. For additional information about the spinning guild, please call Janet Szabo at (717) 235-0325.

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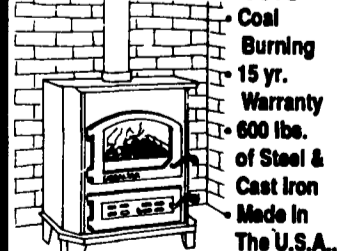
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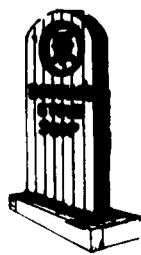
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