

Fitzkee Propagates Apples and Living Gifts

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MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) —

Many people recognize Dan Fitzkee as the man with a passion to raise the largest apples in the area.

The Manheim man received national recognition a few years ago when he picked a 2.71 pound apple from his tree.

"I missed the Guinness Book of records by .03 of a pound," Fitzkee said. His picture appears in a national seed catalogue that promotes an apple tree called Stark's Jumbo Special.

Fitzkee is still trying to raise the biggest apple. Although he continues to get the blue ribbon at the Manheim Community Farm Show for the biggest apple, he hasn't been able to attain the world record.

That's O.K. Fitzkee has another passion—help the hungry—which he seeks to propagate in others.

Fitzkee takes the biblical injunction seriously: If a man has two coats, he should share one with the one who has none, and if he has food, he should do likewise.

Fitzkee is one of the leaders of the Living Gift Fair, begun in the 1980s, when his son Don and other students at Elizabethtown College took up the challenge of raising money for those in need.

Donating a "Living Gift" doesn't mean donating your organs after your death. The Living Gift refers to Heifer Project International (HPI), a nonprofit organization committed to alleviating hunger and poverty by providing animals and related assistance.

People purchase an animal or share of an animal in the name of a friend to give to those in need.

A family in need gets the HPI animal. In return, each recipient passes on the gift by giving one or more of the first offspring to another needy family. This way the project is self-perpetuating and in-

some villages has been continuing 10 years after the first animal was given.

Those who receive a Living Gift are given an attractive HPI gift card to give to the person in whose name it was purchased.

Often at Christmas, it is difficult to know what to buy or if it will be appreciated by the receiver. For those who participate in the Living Gift Fair, Fitzkee said, "You have the satisfaction of knowing that your gift was needed."

In the past, Fitzkee donated some bees to HPI. One year Fitzkee delivered the bees to a West Virginia family. Fitzkee was amazed to see the poverty that existed there.

"You hear about malnutrition and poverty in other countries. Even if there weren't signs of malnutrition, the people in the mountains were so isolated that Fitzkee was unable to reach them with his pickup truck.

After driving through creeks, Fitzkee had to park his truck and depend upon someone else with a more brawny truck to deliver the shipment.

In poverty-stricken areas, recipients are often women. The men often work in distant cities because there are no jobs where they live.

"People have a desire to help themselves and to help in the development of the community. Proper training to teach the care of the animal is a major requirement for those who are recipients in order to assure that the venture will be successful," Fitzkee said.

"Compared to people in other countries, we are all rich," Fitzkee said.

"A living gift helps wipe out discouragement and hopelessness in people who have no resources to help themselves. A gift animal in some of these countries can double the income for some families," Fitzkee said.

"A Living Gift isn't just a hand-out. It lifts up recipients and enables them to help others, which gives them self-esteem."

When the Living Gift Fair was first established, only large animals were used. Things have changed a lot.

"Now, we have more than two dozen animals to choose from," said Fitzkee.

Goats are one of the most needed gifts. For families who have no refrigeration, a goat provides just the right amount of milk daily. A goat can be raised on steep terrain and doesn't need much land.

Fitzkee said that agriculture missionaries work closely with those who receive projects. In many countries, the land has been abused and is so poor that crops cannot be raised on it. Trees have often been cut down and need to be replanted to provide leaves for goats and nitrogen for the soil. Animal manure helps enrich the land.

"It's a matter of stewardship, where all things work together," Fitzkee said.

When the concept of gift giving first began, it was typical for farmers to donate animals for the projects. Today it often costs more money to ship the animal than the animal costs.

To counteract these costs, the animal is now purchased closer to the area where it is to be used. Camels and llamas are good examples of animals that would be extremely expensive to purchase in this country but are much cheaper in countries where they are used. Using animals from the same country often means the animal is more resistant to parasites and easily adapts to the climate.

Ostriches are growing in popularity. An ostrich produces 60 to 90 eggs annually. Meat, skin, feathers—all parts of the bird are used.

Fitzkee said that snails are probably the most unusual project. They are used for food in places such as Ghana.

In some countries, such as Romania, the gift includes semen straws as a means to upgrade the genetic quality of the cows.

The Living Gift Fair is held in the fellowship hall at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Tables are set up with explanations of current projects in the country it is in. An explanation of what animal is used, how it provides food, income, and printed materials are available free.

Participants mark purchases on a shopping list, pay for the gift or gifts and receive a recognition card showing what has been purchased in the name of a friend or family member.

Also available to purchase at the Living Gift Fair are soups, sandwiches, drinks, apple dumplings, other lunch items, baked goods, craft items, and toys. Profits from these also go toward the HPI project.

Hammercreek Exotics provides animals for a petting zoo during the Fair. Balloons, games, puppet shows, and other activities are pro-



Dan Fitzkee has a passion for propagating apples and for helping the hungry. He takes the biblical injunction seriously: If a man has two coats, he should share one with the one who has none, and if he has food, he should do likewise. One of the best ways to share, Fitzkee believes is through the Living Gift Fair, which he helps to oversee each year.

vided at the Children's Corner.

A large Christmas tree in the center is decorated as participants purchase animals and a shape of the animal purchased is attached to the tree.

Last year \$19,000 was raised. This year, the committee has set a goal to raise more than \$20,000.

The 11th annual Living Gift Fair will be Saturday, Nov. 28, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Lititz Church of the Brethren, 300 W. Orange St. (across from Warwick High School). Contributions are tax deductible.

For more information, call Dan Fitzkee at (717) 665-5743.

Have A Cow

LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Short on gift ideas for the person who has got everything?

Well, have a cow! Or a goat, or a yak, or hive of bees.

These and a variety of other familiar and not-so-familiar animals will be on sale at the 11th annual Heifer Project International Living Gift Fair November 28 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Lititz Church of the Brethren.

The fair provides conscientious Christmas shoppers with an alternative to the materialism of the holiday season.

Here's how it works: Shoppers purchase animals in the name of a friend. The friends receives an attractive HPI gift card. A family in need receives the animal. Decorated tables provide information about how

HPI animals benefit poor families in the US and abroad.

Those wishing to take something home with them can choose from Discovery Toys, HPI clothing and merchandise, homemade baked goods, arts and crafts, and more. Bring the whole family for lunch.

Special children's attractions include live animals to see and touch, puppet shows at 10, 11:15, and 12:30 by Sandy Brandt, face painting, and helium-filled balloons.

The Lititz Church of the Brethren is located at 300 W. Orange St., in Lititz, directly across from Warwick High School. Donations of crafts and baked goods will be accepted until the day of the fair. To learn more, call Dan Fitzkee at 717-665-5743.



With the apple on the left, Dan Fitzkee missed the Guinness Book of records by .03 of a pound. He had a replica of the apple made and each year tries to beat it. This year, the apples were small but Fitzkee still won first place at the Manheim Community Fair with the apple on the right.

