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CHRISTMAS: Don't look for gifts under the tree of these Ridgefield children

By Macklin Reid, Ridgefield Press Staff



The Divitto children, Blake, in front, Collette and Steele, gave up Christmas presents this year so the money could be donated to the United Way of Northern Fairfield County. —Macklin Reid photo

Last Christmas Blake Divitto's father gave her a new "quad" — a four-wheel-drive, all-terrain vehicle. Her brother, Steele, got one, too. Sister Collette already had an ATV — she got a new bike.

This year, not so much.

There'll be some things under the tree for the kids — clothes and things — but the usual "big gifts" that many Ridgefield kids expect Dad to come through with won't be there.

The money's gone.

In late November, the Divitto kids told their father to take the money he'd normally spend making their

Christmas wishes come true and donate it to charity.

Figuring he'd normally spend about \$500 each on Blake, 12, Steele, 15, and Collette, 16, Dan Divitto wrote a check for \$1,500 to the United Way of Northern Fairfield County.

They'd each donated \$500 to the needy for Christmas.

"It's just a good feeling to give," said Blake Divitto.

They'd been talking about Christmas and listening to the radio, which was tuned to the "Guy-in-the-Sky" fund-raiser started by local I-95 radio personality Neil Hedley. They all went to Bethel to make the donation in person at the site where Mr. Hedley lived for 19 days — Nov. 27 to Dec. 15 — atop a 25-foot scaffold in Bethel, broadcasting and raising money for charity.

"We were all wondering what we wanted for Christmas and we were listening to the I-95 guy," said Blake. "He was just asking anybody who has any money, or anything like that, please donate to the charity."

They'd realized their Christmas lists were filled with things that might be nice to have, but that were icing-on-the-cake kinds of things — nothing they couldn't easily do without.

"We don't need anything, we just want things," said Blake.

"What struck home, we were just talking about how when you give, you get back in return," said her father. "Just the feeling of it, and how things come back around to you."

"It was kind of a group decision," said Steele.

Like many kids growing up in Ridgefield, the Divittos have a lot by most people's standards — and in many different ways. Giving isn't a new concept to them.

"It feels good to give, instead of getting," said Steele. "Last year we got a lot of stuff."

"There's always something you want," said Mr. Divitto.

"We have everything we need," said Blake.

Mr. Divitto noted that Steele gives some of the money he earns to a Down syndrome charity, and that he'd also volunteered at the high school with disabled kids.

"He went with me to my Best Buddies group," said Collette.

Blake recalled a previous Christmas when the family went on a visit to a shelter.

"We went to a place in Danbury where the people had nothing for Christmas — it was moms and their children," she said. "We brought them presents. It was such a nice feeling."

Mr. Divitto, who didn't grow up in the kind of affluence his children enjoy, said it was gratifying to him that they had some appreciation for the circumstances of others who aren't as lucky as they are.

"I'm just really proud of them," he said. "The kids are always considerate, and giving. They're just good, kind kids."

At Christmastime, the kids go with their mother, Rosemary Divitto, to an aunt's house on Christmas Eve, then spend Christmas Day with their father. Both parents live in town.

"Their mom really instills this in them, too," Mr. Divitto said.

The Guy-in-the-Sky event raised \$175,000 for the United Way of Northern Fairfield County, a charity that funds some 80 programs in the greater Danbury area.

Where, the kids were asked, did they hope the money they'd donated would go?

"Just to somebody that really needs it, and will use it wisely," said Blake.

"Families, mostly," added Steele.

"Sometimes there are people who are so poor," said Collette. "They have no house to live in, no clothes, no food."