

by DWAYNE YATES | REPORTER

Aurora -- Children who otherwise might not see many gifts under their trees this Christmas have the opportunity to get a free bike thanks to the generosity of an area man.



In 2006, Aurora resident Kim Schaefer started Bikes 4 Kids, when he couldn't keep his eyes off a boys motorcycle-styled bicycle at Big Lots.

Schaefer said he walked past the bike a few times and eventually went home without buying it. When he got home, he couldn't keep his mind off that bike.

So he went back to purchase it two months later. He describes this as a call from God.

"I believe there was a little bit of divine intervention there because the haunting became almost like a voice in my head saying 'Buy the bike. Buy the bike' -- to the point where I went back and bought it," he said.

When he got the bike home he knew exactly what he was going to do with it.

"Of course, my wife laughed at me and asked, 'What are you going to do with that?'" Schaefer said. "I said, 'I'm going to give it away!' and that's pretty much how it all started."

As the years went on, Schaefer continued buying bikes, and people started donating them. Schaefer said the Chagrin Valley Jaycees began to donate money, and the number of people bringing bikes now doubles and triples every year.

There aren't any real qualifications to get a bicycle from Bikes 4 Kids. Schaefer said most of them are given to people he runs into who seem like they need help.

"THEY'RE IN need of hope," Schaefer said. "I give bikes to families who've lost their homes because they're unemployed and there's not going to be a Christmas."

Schaefer said he never likes to boast about his charitable organization. Information about it has been spread by word of mouth.

"It's not been something I go out and brag about or anything I talk about because it's not really me doing this," Schaefer said. "It's being done through me."

"So only the people I'm closest to and people giving the bikes away are the ones who know about it."

Five years later, Schaefer recognizes that the program has potential to be bigger.

"I've really shied away from being in the forefront of it up until now, but I see this is going to get bigger and it's kind of out of my control right now," Schaefer said. This year, Chagrin Valley Jaycees donated \$1,500 to buy bikes. Schaefer said he tries to match that amount to buy as many bikes as possible.

He buys new bikes, but he also shops at Goodwill stores for used bikes to take home, fix up and give to children.

Schaefer is up to 100 bikes this year and is looking to expand his team to store and distribute them.

Throughout the years, he has worked with Akron and Kent public schools and people in need. At a recent assembly at an Akron school, Schaefer gave away bikes to children with good grades.

Laurie Knuth, a counselor at Kent Roosevelt High School, said she usually gives families in need gift cards to various retail and grocery stores. But last year, she teamed up with Schaefer to give children new bicycles.

"WE HAVE a lot of poverty in Kent," Knuth said. "Thirty-seven percent of our population is at poverty level. So Kim and I started talking, and he was willing to help."

Knuth recently donated a bigger bike to an adult who had no means of transportation, which shows that there's no real age limit for the Bikes 4 Kids program.

Knuth said people are familiar with her for her holiday gift card program, and a lot of times they'll approach her and ask for help. She said she believes spreading goodwill is important for children's growth and development.

"Kim believes that every kid should have a bike," Knuth said. "When you do good things and are an example to kids that positive things can happen, you bring positive moments into these kids' lives."



Schaefer believes having moments like this affects the children's lives in the future. "Hopefully, if someone does something nice for them, somewhere down the line they'll do something good when they grow up. It's almost like a pay-it-forward type of thing."

Schaefer does most of his work on his own, but he's looking for others to get involved by donating time and bicycles. Next year, he said he wants to triple this year's 100-bike count. Eventually, he wants to work with bigger charities and Wal-mart to get bikes to a larger number of children.

"Knowing that you're bringing hope into the world where there was none [is most important to me]," Schaefer said. "And it's good that children know there's someone out there who cares."

