

# Millworkers provide a merry Christmas

By Gail Oberst

Correspondent, The Sun

Numbers can be good and bad. Here are some good holiday numbers: In the past eight years in Sheridan, Williamson and Grand Ronde, 328 families including 986 children and 508 adults got \$141,253 worth of food, clothes, toys, gifts, through the Adopt-a-Family program organized by Williamson and Fort Hill employees.

How about these numbers: 37 Fort Hill Lumber mill workers collected 2,297 pounds of food for those families and won the annual competition between the small mill and its big brother, Williamson Lumber.

Or, how about \$475 in toys and gifts and a week's worth of groceries including a Christmas turkey? That's what the new human resources manager, Vic White, said he and his wife, Dixie, gathered up for the two adults and three children he adopted as part of the mill's annual Adopt-a-Family program.

"Dixie took a big role," said White, who later admitted his wife did everything. She talked to the family and found out what the

three children wanted for Christmas. Dolls, cars and games were on the list, and a stocking stuffed with candy "Oh, and some fruit," White said. If the family needs a tree, one is found for them.

The Whites adopted a family just like 73 other employees did for 73 local families. The White's family: "They were in pretty rough shape, looking for work," White said. "They just needed a little help to get back on their feet. He just got a job."

Everyone pitches in this time of year. The employees employ their Christmas vacationer teens to fill grocery boxes according to orders from the family adopters.

And businesses do their part: Thriftway Corner Store gives a discount on groceries. So does Wal-Mart. The discounts allow the shoppers to buy more food and gifts for the children. "I just want to say thank you to Wal-Mart and Thriftway. We appreciate that help."

The company, Hampton Lumber, does its part as well. The employees raised more than \$15,000 at fundraisers throughout the year,

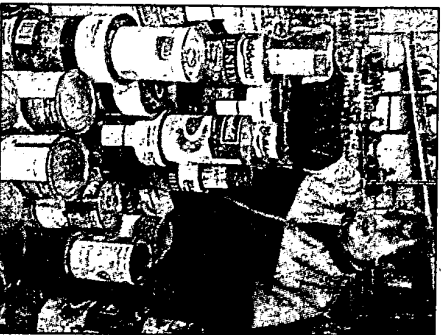


Photo by Shelley Harman

**Boni Nelson, 12, of Sheridan, stacks cans of food donated by mill employees.**

and the company matched it, adding \$31,222 to this year's spending power.

The Adopt-a-Family program started in 1995 and raised \$1,003 for four families.

Monday, in a chilly purchasing warehouse building, volunteers **See MILLS, Page 15**

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pushed aside the spare bearings, chains, belts and sprockets and filled about 35 eight-foot tables donated by Hertz Rental with groceries to sort into boxes for delivery.

The grocery list is practical, purchased locally and has been changed over time, said David Keyser, mill manager. Dish soap and dental care items donated by three local dentists are among the sacks of potatoes, flour and sugar; next to the orange juice and gallon of milk. Someone is stacking cans, and another is folding coats cleaned by McMinnville Cleaners and arranging stuffed animals.

One group, mostly teens, are huddled around a radiant heater waiting for the boxes to be picked up. On their breaks and after their shifts, the adopters come to load up the boxes and deliver it to their adoptees. Over time, the process has become more efficient. Each year, more employees get involved.

Why do they do it? Because people work hard and still can't make it, Keyser said. And that's where the numbers turn bad.

According to Children First of Oregon, a non-profit data book about the status of children, 10 per-

cent of all children in Yamhill County — 2,400 — live in poverty. Twenty-five percent of all children live with one parent, meaning, one income, usually a mother's. Unemployment is worse this year than last, at 7.8 percent.

The mill workers who adopted families this year are driving away in pickups and minivans, some pretty beat up, but for 73 families this year, the trucks are Santa's sleighs.