

## American Fork students donate bears to Ogden medical center

Kristin McQuivey - Correspondent | Posted: Saturday, December 25, 2010 12:20 am

**AMERICAN FORK** -- American Heritage School has an annual tradition called "Teddy Bears for Christmas," and its students have donated more than 8,000 plush toys since the project was initiated 16 years ago.

"I started the teddy bear project with Dr. [Floyd] Saeger, who established the clinic for the homeless in Ogden," said Lauri Updike, a seventh-grade teacher at American Heritage. "He determined that every child needed a teddy bear and I began the project to collect them."

Each student at the school is asked to bring a new teddy bear to put under the school Christmas tree. Then the school delivers the bears to Saeger Memorial Clinic at the Ogden Rescue Mission. Every child who goes to the shelter receives one of the bears to have for their own.

"The facility depends on the bears that we collect as it lasts them throughout the entire year," said Mike Bohn, associate director of the Development and Family Education Center for American Heritage.

In keeping with the spirit of the season, the students are asked to try to earn their own money for the bear they will donate.

"I was amazed when I watched how excited the students got to donate a teddy bear," said Andy Griffith, an eighth-grade teacher at the school. "I think it allows the students to think about other people first. They try to find a very cute bear and take it very seriously."

Bears are collected from students during the month, and on the last day of school before Christmas break there is a devotional about the service project. The students then participate in a "hugging line" where they send off each bear that was gathered for the shelter.

"It's enlightening to realize what you're doing for these little kids who have nothing," said Katie Nazer, a junior. "You are basically giving them your love and a little bit of hope."

Many of the students have participated in the Teddy Bears for Christmas project for several years. Nazer has memories of hugging the bears in third grade and eighth-grader Rosie Monson said she has been donating bears since kindergarten.

"I think it's just fun, because service always makes me happy," Monson said. "Giving the teddy bear a hug feels like you are giving someone something extra special."

Bohn said the project is one of the most memorable activities the students do at American Heritage School.

"It's my first year doing the teddy bear hug," said Esteban Selva, a French foreign exchange student who is a senior. "At first I thought it was kind of strange, but then I realized it is for children who have nothing, and maybe they can feel the love we give to them through the bears."

