

## 2010-2011 Leadership Team



# Boulder City Sunrise Rotary

*"Service Above Self" - Building Communities Bridging Continents*

## The Rotary Wheel

December 30, 2010

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## The Angel Tree



Sue McCullough, representing the Angel Tree Project and Eric Estes representing BC Sunrise, inventory bikes for distribution.

Again this year Sunrise Rotary members as well as the club itself supported the Angel Tree Program. At the last minute club members and spouses usually shop for the remaining names to finish the Angel Tree project. This year, however, we also gifted 18 bikes, collected during the year, to those less fortunate.

Lee McDonald coordinated the efforts for our club, accumulated the bikes, assembled the bikes, and delivered the bikes to the library for distribution. Thanks Lee for all you do!

I have been searching for information on the history of the Angel Tree Program. This is as close as I can get to its beginning over 27 years ago.

Six million. That's the cumulative

number of prisoners' children served by Angel Tree® in the U.S. over the past 27 years.

And an ex-prisoner started it all.

Mary Kay Beard, founder of Angel Tree says "I am both awed and humbled to have been a part of something so enormously effective. Being there at the beginning-I consider it one of the highest privileges of my life."

Mary Kay was a safecracker, a bank robber, and one of America's Most Wanted. Arrested in June of 1972, she quickly collected 11 federal indictments and 35 charges against her. But her 180-year sentence turned into a six-year sentence—during which time she asked God to change her hardened heart.

On the three Christmases that she spent at the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Alabama, local church groups brought the inmates gifts of toothpaste and soap. Intrigued, Mary Kay watched as her fellow prisoners wrapped up the small gifts and gave them to their children at their Christmas visit.

"Most children wouldn't think much of such small gifts, but in prison there was such joy on their faces!" says Mary Kay. "It didn't really matter to them what they got; it was from *Mama*."

After being paroled, Mary Kay accepted Prison Fellowship's challenge to become their first Alabama State Director in 1982. One of her assignments was to create a Christmas project for prisoners. At one of her speaking engagements, a conversation with an ex-prisoner's daughter solidified the project's focus.

"What about the inmate's kids?" the woman asked. "*They* are the real victims."

Mary Kay recalled the toiletries that prisoners gave their children on Christmas. So she and a crew of volunteers began creating a program to provide *real* gifts for prisoners' children.

Their plan was to erect a Christmas tree at Birmingham's Brookwood Mall, encouraging shoppers to buy presents for specific children. Then someone suggested writing the children's names on paper ornaments shaped like angels—creating an "Angel Tree"!

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## Teen Leadership Camp (TLC)

November 19th thru the 24th, 4 Sunrise Rotary sponsored students traveled to Irvine, California for the annual TLC. Pictured are Trenton Carmell, Charlotte Wall and Megan Chase. (Not pictured Jacson Tenney).

Lee McDonald and Marcie Gibson co-chair TLC for our club.

Marcie says, "Teen Leadership Camp is a weekend camp. Each year Sunrise and the Noon Rotary sponsor two boys and girls from the eighth grade to attend. District 5300 sends students from all over our territory. It teaches them a variety of different leadership skills with different forums. They have speakers, zip lines, activities and exercises. They learn what Rotary is all about. They are the Youth we entrust to our future. Most of these kids will go on to attend RYLA which is for high school Juniors and also sponsored by Rotary and our clubs in Boulder City. Rotarians who wish to be the chaperones at TLC or RYLA must register and attend facilitator classes. The students are proposed by their teachers and the principal of their school. Then based on their applications and interview process they are chosen to attend TLC."



(Angel Tree from page 1)

So Mary Kay helped cut out 100 paper-angel ornaments and then visited prisoners to invite them to sign up their children.

"God never wastes anything," Mary Kay says. "He used my own criminal past to give me credibility in their eyes. And they trusted us."

Mary Kay called the caretakers of the children and asked what they wanted for Christmas. Then, she wrote each child's name and the "gift wishes" on an angel ornament.

On the day after Thanksgiving—the busiest retail day of the year—an Angel Tree greeted shoppers at the top of the mall's escalator. An advertisement in the *Birmingham News* had notified readers of the project. Many of the store owners agreed to offer a 10-percent discount to shoppers who bought their Angel Tree gifts there.

The response was overwhelming. That weekend, shoppers took all 100 angels to buy gifts. So Mary Kay visited more prisons, called more caretakers, and put more angels on the tree.

She and the volunteers wrapped gifts and made sure they would get to the right child. Then Mary Kay called the caregivers of the prisoners' children to pick up the presents. She mobilized the Gideons and the *Birmingham News* deliverers to take gifts to children who lived far away.

That year 556 children received gifts—but the effects spread even farther. "In January, all of my Bible study groups at that prison doubled or tripled," said Mary Kay. "The newcomers were the inmates whose children had received gifts."

The next year, Angel Tree branched out to 12 states and soon became a church-based program. Now—as PF's most popular program—it reaches prisoners' children not only throughout the U.S. but in 90 other countries as well.

Angel Tree is not just for Christmas anymore! Now they encourage and equip churches to reach out to prisoners' children and their caregivers year-round—helping to restore family bonds and break the generational cycle of crime.

More and more churches now welcome prisoners' families into their existing church services and ministries. And many provide other special outreaches, such as sending the children to Christian summer camps and matching the children with caring adult mentors.

It has also branched to hospitals, care centers, organizations, businesses and individuals as well and now includes all those less fortunate.

Thank you Sunrise Rotarians for supporting this most worthwhile cause!