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Kids in poverty will ride high on bikes from Mission Arlington

BY FAYE REEDER

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It will be a milestone for a special hometown community initiative on Saturday when the crowd of parents and kids gather in the parking lot at 2229 W. Park Row at 9 a.m. On that special morning, it will mark the 10th anniversary of the Bikes for Mission Arlington program, and the decade of achievements from this initiative are impressive.

When a couple of dads back in 2007 decided they wanted their kids to experience the thrill of giving to those less fortunate, they took them shopping for bicycles and delivered six of them to Mission Arlington to be gifted to kids living in poverty.

From six bikes in the beginning, the program has steadily grown and last year 1,750 bikes were donated through this effort. Because so many parents want the opportunity to teach

their children what it means to unselfishly give to others, the easily understood lesson of buying the bike and helmet and then joining the caravan of cars as the bikes are delivered to the Mission Arlington Christmas Store is an idea that caught on.

“It’s a blessing you cannot explain,” said Mission director **Tillie Burgin** in a recorded interview. Burgin said the one thing most kids at the Mission Arlington store ask for at Christmas is a bicycle and that without the ‘Bikes’ program their families could not go out and buy one for them.

Arlington businessman **Clay Kelley** has been involved in the program for years. “Little did we know that Bikes would grow to where it is today. From 6 bikes the first year to over 1,750 last year — it is truly a God thing,” Kelley said.

However, planting seeds for the future is important to sustain the effort. “It is our goal to reach younger families to get involved in Bikes and reach the next generation,” Kelley added. “When Bikes began, all of our kids were in elementary school, now most of the leadership team’s kids are in college.”

The lofty goal this year is to gift 2,000 bikes and helmets to kids served by Mission Arlington. The organizers invite anyone in the community to join the special experience of being a part of the police-escorted caravan that travels from Park Row Dr. to the Mission store on Abram St. to deliver the bicycles. All that’s required is to have your child choose a new bike for someone his or her own age and bring it to the Saturday gathering.

In a Facebook post Kelley wrote: “As a dad, I know what it is like to take my boys and have them pick out bikes that they know they will not receive and donate them to children who they will likely never meet. Acts of compassion and selfless service are the greatest gifts I have given my sons...it is also Mission Arlington's mission and what Christmas is all about.”

To learn more, visit www.BikesforMissionArlington.org or check out the group’s Facebook page.