

Mary Wood wants a new room for Christmas; Benefit dinner and community support plays an important role

By Adam St. Pierre

A beaming display of Christmas decorations makes a home stand out on a dim stretch of Lakeview Ave. Indoors, five-year-old Mary Wood's cerebral palsy, apneic seizures and assortment of hardships accentuate her bright enthusiasm for life and the holidays.

Mary's Christmas list is simple: two front teeth, a dog, a new room.

According to her mother, Amy Wood, the first two gifts will have to wait a while, but the third might come sooner than expected, making the family's life a lot easier with support pouring from the community.

Mary sleeps upstairs with her parents in their small home. With nothing but a kitchen, laundry room and living room on the bottom floor, her parents frequently carry Mary up and down the stairs.

"This addition to the house would take away a lot of stress for all of us," says Mary's father, Sean Wood. The parents have been living from paycheck to paycheck and postponing construction due to a lack of funds.

The Cerebral Palsy Association helped the family by building entrance ramps and plans on converting their downstairs laundry room into a bathroom. Building a room to accompany that bathroom, however, is a task the Woods have to rely on themselves

and the community to accomplish.

"She (Mary) isn't getting any lighter, we're not getting any younger," says Mrs. Wood. She says their stairway is too narrow to install a lift, and her recent back problems are beginning to make carrying Mary up the stairs dangerous for them both.

A benefit dinner held on Dec. 13 at the Moose Lodge raised more than \$4,000 for Mary's family to build the new room. Donations from organizations and community members have also been essential in the effort to support Mary.

Mrs. Wood says that if the room requires a foundation, materials will cost around \$9,000. The Woods want it to be 16'x16', big enough for two beds so they can sleep in the room and monitor Mary.

The family was approached at the dinner and offered free labor and equipment for when building starts. Mrs. Wood says she plans on posting pictures of the room's construction on Facebook to keep the public updated on what they helped build.

"Knowing that many people love my kid just makes a huge difference," says Mrs. Wood. "The community has been awesome with helping us; that's what's nice about living in such a small town."

"I didn't even know how many people actually knew Mary until we had this

benefit," Mr. Wood adds. "When we asked for help for her the amount of it we received was shocking."

Pamela Dennis, Mary's grandmother, decided to organize the benefit dinner after noticing how difficult it was for Mr. and Mrs. Wood to care for Mary in limited residential space. She drove around to businesses in the Tri-Lakes area, collecting more than 100 gift certificates and goods to be raffled at the benefit dinner.

Dennis is a pillar of comfort for the parents. She babysits Mary and her twin brother, Sean Jr., to give the parents a break from the 24-hour supervision Mary needs.

"She's just got something special, I don't know what it is. There's this special glow to her that makes me emotional sometimes," Dennis says, looking to Mary with watering eyes and a smile.

Mary was born in 2008 at the Adirondack Medical Center and suffered from low sugar and cerebral hemorrhages that caused her disabilities. She was named after Mrs. Wood's close friend Mary Coady, who passed away in a motorcycle accident earlier that year.

Mrs. Wood says conviction, compassion and independence are traits her daughter shows that remind her of Coady.

Doctors gave Mary's parents grim hopes for their daughter's future of conversation, fine motor



skills and behaving like anything more than a "wet noodle." Yet, Mary radiates personality and determination. She flicks through an electronic tablet and sings along to pop songs. In front of the television, she waves the controller of a Nintendo Wii and finishes games without assistance.

Mr. Wood says Mary continues to astonish him with her growing ability to speak and learn new tasks.

"Anything she can do on her own, she absolutely loves to do it," Mr. Wood says. In the background, Mary swings the Wii controller at a crooked angle and giggles as the television congratulates her on a good bowling shot.

Raising a disabled child hasn't been easy for the parents, who had previous experience working with handicapped people at Sunmount. They say the

lot closer," says Mr. Wood. "We have to be that way for her. She needs a solid foundation with a family life that is strong and supportive all the time."

Family isn't Mary's only source of support. The Moose Lodge was packed with community members during the dinner. Mary's cheery disposition draws in flocks of peers in school, eager to say hello to her and sometimes making her late for class.

Despite a life of walking in a gate trainer and tube assisted feeding, Mary faces the holidays like an average child. You won't find a stronger immune system or stable vision on her list to Santa, just a wish for two front teeth to grow back — and perhaps a new Miley Cyrus (her current favorite artist) album to sing along with.

Mary deals hugs and blows kisses to strangers with contagious holiday spirit, showing that it sometimes takes darkness to recognize the full worth of light.

Piercefield will benefit from Blueway Corridor grant

A regular board meeting of the Town of Piercefield was held on December 11.

Highway Superintendent Tim Fuller has purchased a diesel generator from Fort Drum for \$500. He was authorized by the board to buy a new Hyundai Wheel Loader with a three-year warranty in even trade for the town's two-year-old John Deere loader from Tracey Road Equipment in Watertown.

Supervisor Neil Pickering will consult with Town Attorney Kirk Gagnier regarding the damage done this summer to the Massawepie Road.

The Bancroft Road is open for snowmobilers and ATV traffic only.

The outdoor wood boiler failed and it was discovered that somehow the wiring had gotten burned. Jay Rust rewired it and rerouted the wiring to prevent future failure. Highway Superintendent Fuller will bring this defect to the manufacturer's attention.

The town received \$1,855.50 from the sale of

scrap metal to Moore Recycling.

Although the ROOST website is up and running, there is much dissatisfaction with how Piercefield is presented. Supervisor Pickering asked for a list of issues that he will present to ROOST.

Regarding the IP site cleanup, test pits have been dug but there is no word on the results. It appears that any contamination will be minor.

A grant of \$501,665 has been approved for projects along the Blueway Corridor. Piercefield will be included for construction of kiosks and a canoe launch at the Piercefield beach.

Dog Control Officer Jeff Defayette needs equipment for the job. He will go online to find where to purchase required items. He has requested that he be authorized to conduct a dog census in 2015. The board will establish licensing and census fees at the annual meeting in January.

The backup generator at the Conifer water

pumphouse caught fire and is a total loss. The building and pumps, however, are okay. The insurance companies are being brought up to speed. Two estimates are required for replacement, and there is a \$1,000 deductible.

The Tupper Lake Volunteer Ambulance and Rescue Squad has asked Piercefield to increase its annual donation amount. Supervisor Pickering will send a letter indicating that the 2015 budget has already been approved and that consideration will be given for the following year.

The Piercefield court clerk will be going south for

the winter. A substitute will fill in for her.

The board adopted a resolution approving a three-year winter maintenance agreement with the county for the plowing of county roads within the town.

The board further approved the installation of caller ID for the town justice at a rate of \$5.00 per month additional.

Town Clerk Don Mauer announced that the new St. Lawrence County Legislator representing Piercefield is Rick Perkins.

The next regular meeting of the town board will be on January 8, 2015.

Mary's Corner

Jesus Calling

As you wait attentively for My Presence, the Light of the knowledge of My Glory shines upon you. This radiant knowledge transcends all understanding. It transforms every fiber of your being: renewing your mind, cleansing your heart, invigorating your body. Open yourself fully to My Presence; be awed by My glorious Being.

Try to imagine what I gave up when I came into your world as a baby. I set aside My Glory, so that I could identify with mankind. I accepted the limitations of infancy under the most appalling conditions — a filthy stable. That was a dark night for Me, even though angels lit up the sky proclaiming "Glory!" to awestruck shepherds.

When you sit quietly with Me, the process I went through is reversed in your experience. As you identify with Me, heaven's vistas open up before you — granting you glimpses of My Glory. I became poor so that you might become rich. Sing Hallelujahs to My holy Name!

2 Corinthians 4:6; Philippians 2:6-7; Luke 2:13-14; 2 Corinthians 8:9

Correction

In the Barwell-LaFlame engagement announcement in last week's Free Press, Richard LaFlame was described as a hospitalist physician. He is in fact a hospitalist physician assistant.

Anyone wishing to send a Christmas greeting or write to David Gonyea can send it to his new address: 1080 Sheldon Ave, Kingman, AZ 86409.

Christmas Eve Service

The United Community Church invites the community to

Christmas Eve Services
December 24th
7:00 pm
23 High St. (Next to the Fire House)

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Moose Lodge #640
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