

# Redmond resident plans to spread birthday joy

BY MARY STEVENS DECKER  
Redmond Reporter

Redmond resident Briana Keller is marking a milestone birthday — her “big 3-0” — by spreading birthday joy to hundreds of children she’ll never meet. And she’d love it if you would lend a hand, at a special event on Saturday, Jan. 12 or whenever it’s convenient for your family or friends.

The Jan. 12 event is at the Redmond Regional Library, 15990 NE 85th St., beginning at 1:30 p.m. Keller needs volunteers to assemble and stuff 500 birthday bags for home-less or low-income kids served by Hopelink. From 1:30-2:30, helpers will take toys out of packages and organize piles. The most help is needed be-

tween 2:30-3:30 when participants will put toys in bags with tissue paper and decorate the bags with ribbons. Cupcakes and clean-up are scheduled from 3:30-4:00 and from 4:00-5:00, volunteers will deliver the bags to Hopelink’s Bellevue office, for distribution to clients throughout Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland.

Keller’s hosting this work party as the Puget Sound coordinator of Cheerful Givers, an organization founded in Minnesota in 1993. She read it about in People magazine three years ago, assumed it was a national effort and called its founder, asking how to get in touch with a Seattle representative. After learning there wasn’t a group outside of Min-

nesota, she decided that she’d start one.

“My husband and I were at a place in our lives of actively looking to give back to the community,” explained Keller, a career counselor at the University of Washington. Her husband’s employed by Microsoft.

“We had done \$20 checks here and there. I’m big into birthdays and making gift bags. I made them for our wedding, so this came very naturally,” she said.

She normally works with small teams of co-workers or friends. Five or six people will shop for toys and they get together every three months to spend a lunch hour making gift bags. Keller provides the bags, tissues and ribbons. They generally assemble about 30 bags at a time.

For the Jan. 12 event — Keller’s actual birthday is Jan. 13 — she asked friends and family for cash donations and collected \$2,100 with which to buy toys and books.

She and her fellow Cheerful Givers don’t personally give the gift bags to the children. The bags delivered to Hopelink will be distributed to parents and guardians through food banks or transitional housing programs. But Keller sees the benefits of the program as threefold.

“First, it helps volunteers because it’s fun to shop for the gifts and make the bags and it’s really concrete. When you see the pile of gift bags, you see tangible results of what you’re doing, which is very rewarding,” she said. “And for the parents, it’s stressful and embarrassing to not have

anything to give your child on a birthday. The founder of the Cheerful Givers said she’d met kids who didn’t even know it was their birthday — it wasn’t talked about or celebrated. To be able to provide this helps the parent/child bond.”

And most of all, “Birthdays are important for children,” Keller added. “This is an issue that never goes away. Some people donate cash or toys once a year at Christmas time, but there are hundreds of birthdays all through the year and an ongoing need to make sure these kids aren’t forgotten.”

As well as using her own birthday as a time to show generosity, she wants to see the numbers of Cheerful Givers grow throughout Redmond and surrounding communities. Scout troops, school groups or anyone who’s interested in the cause can contact Keller about organizing a chapter or pitching in at the Jan. 12 event. E-mail [briana\\_keller@hotmail.com](mailto:briana_keller@hotmail.com) or call (206) 618-5215.

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