



## Caring Brings Tears

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The Christmas season brought tears to many Bakersfield families. Tears of joy, tears of hope, and tears of thankfulness flowed as families in need received an outpouring of caring from the community. Through the generosity of diverse local organizations, families who otherwise would not have had Christmas gifts were showered with presents for their children, as well as with food baskets and household furnishings.

Even with the challenges of the economy, community residents looked for ways to assist others. Garden Pathways received numerous requests from businesses and other organizations that wanted to help its clients. **Chevron, Body Xchange, TIC, Frontier High School's wrestling team, Kiwanis "Golden K" Club, and friends of Janis Varner** were among the groups that assisted over 200 participants in Garden Pathways' mentoring and child care programs — Family to Family Mentoring, E3 Performing Arts, and The Garden Christian Preschool.

Tears welled up in Monica Gonzales' eyes when she learned that her family had been adopted by **Chevron's "Warm-a-Heart"** program. She couldn't believe that anyone would want to help her. Gonzales and her five children celebrated with joy when the shiny red dryer arrived. "It's so beautiful," Gonzales exclaimed. "I want to leave it in the living room so everyone can see it!" But that was just the beginning. More gifts followed. Soon Gonzales' bare home was filled with a washer to accompany the dryer, beds and bedding for the children, dressers, and a kitchen table with chairs. The "Warm-a-Heart" team fully stocked the kitchen with dishes, pots and pans, silverware, and other household items; and then came toys for the children, bikes, games, gift certificates, and grocery cards. From the warmth of caring, emerged six hearts full of joy and gratitude.

Just four months earlier, Gonzales and her children were living in an abandoned apartment. Entrapped by substance addiction, depression, and fear, Gonzales saw little hope for her family's future. Gonzales' two teenage sons refused to let their mother give up. They sought help for their mom through Garden Pathways. With the encouragement of a mentor, Gonzales entered the Bakersfield Homeless Shelter in August. She fully engaged in its programs and Garden Pathways' Family to Family Mentoring program. By mid-November, Gonzales had made the positive changes needed to move her family into a four-bedroom house. She is now actively pursuing employment.



*Chevron's "Warm-a-Heart" team celebrates the joy of sharing with the Gonzaleses, their "adopted" family.*

When Ede Pacaldo learned of Gonzales' story, she knew that she wanted to make Christmas extra special for the Gonzales family. She emailed her colleagues at Chevron with a long list of suggested items. Employees and business partners responded in generosity with even more than she had requested. Pacaldo, the "Warm-a-Heart" team leader at Chevron's Kern River site, has participated in the program for over 15 years. She and fellow employee, Silvia Hurtado, organize



*"They look like brothers," Warm-a-Heart team leader Ede Pacaldo exclaims, as she embraces Monica Gonzales' 9-year old son, Orion, and her son Noah, age 10.*

fundraisers throughout the year to raise money to adopt families. This Christmas, their "Warm-a-Heart" team adopted the Gonzaleses and another family that has been mentored at Garden Pathways. At Pacaldo's suggestion, the "Warm-a-Heart" team at Chevron's Camino Media site also partnered with Garden Pathways to adopt a family. Pacaldo repeatedly expresses thankfulness that Chevron allows its employees to conduct fundraisers for community causes, "I'm so blessed to have a good job and a great company that encourages us to support our community. The program has blessed my whole family and helps us to realize how blessed we are." Pacaldo, who involves her sons, Zac and Noah, in the charitable initiatives, notes, "These families are working hard to help themselves and they receive ongoing, long-term support from Garden Pathways."



*Three-year old Gianni Gonzales can hardly wait to try out her Christmas bike from Chevron.*

Body Xchange and T.I.C. (The Industrial Company) also encourage their employees and clients to give back to the community. Under the coordination of Lisa Nelson, director of operations, **Body Xchange** provided gifts to over 80 at-risk families in Garden Pathways' mentoring and child care programs. Children and youth, whose names adorned Christmas trees at Body Xchange health clubs, received toys, bikes, MP3 players, dolls, and games through the annual toy drive.

**T.I.C.** project manager Eddie Berdon personally went grocery shopping so that less fortunate families could have a complete Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. Berdon led the effort to ensure that that his T.I.C. team provided ample gifts — carefully chosen for each family member.

Young people and seniors alike gave generously. **Frontier High School's wrestling team** continued its tradition of adopting families for Christmas. After assistant wrestling coach Ray Mooney and the Titan team made their delivery of gifts to three appreciative families, one of the coaches wanted to do even more. On Christmas Eve, he took it upon himself to purchase Christmas food baskets and delivered them with a warm greeting to each family.

Sunny Scofield, president of **Kiwanis “Golden K” Club**, told Garden Pathways that their members wanted to share the joy of the season with children in need. Residents from Rosewood Senior Living Community arrived with a car filled with teddy bears, dogs, lions, and other cuddly creatures. Children of CalWORKs participants at The Garden Christian Preschool beamed from ear to ear as they hugged the menagerie of stuffed animals that the group of caring seniors provided.

For the eighteenth consecutive year, **Janis Varner and her friends** helped to make Christmas brighter for local families through Varner’s annual Christmas open house. Varner’s friends loaded her home with food and toys — enough for over 100 children and their families. As she does each year, Varner teased her guests, “This is the last year!” But the generosity continues year after year. Their caring hearts cannot stop giving.

Tears flowed at The Garden Community Center as mothers who did not have the means to buy food or gifts picked up their Christmas blessing — their prayers had been answered.

Karen Goh, executive director of Garden Pathways, offers appreciation for the community’s generosity, “We’re very grateful for the many caring community members who have opened their hearts to those in need and have once again shown that Bakersfield is truly a community that cares.” Garden Pathways welcomes volunteers, mentors, and donors throughout the year to invest in lives. Many opportunities are available to impact the future of CalWORKs and CPS participants, youth and their families impacted by gang violence, emancipating and emancipated foster youth, pregnant and parenting youth, and other at-risk youth. For more information, call Karen Goh, executive director, at (661) 633-9133 or visit [www.gardenpathways.org](http://www.gardenpathways.org).



*Monica Gonzales thanks her Garden Pathways mentor, Annette Dominquez, for helping her to build a positive future for her family.*