CIRCLEVILLE— Some of the Youth at the Circleville Juvenile Correction Facility (CJCF) in Circleville have spent the last few weeks hard at work building bikes for the less fortunate children of Ohio, including some in Pickaway County.

At the CJCF, 109 bikes were assembled that will go to families all over Ohio, including 47 bikes that will be given to families in Pickaway County.

“We’re in the process of distributing the bikes right now,” said Nicholas Tatman, children services administrator. “It’s a special thing because we’re fortunate enough to have a relationship with the Bike Lady all these years. They kids love it.”

Tatman said it was important for these children to receive the bikes, which come in all colors and sizes, because a lot of them don’t have much.

“They get a bike that’s already put together that has a bow on it and comes with a helmet and a bike lock,” he said. “For kids that don’t get a whole lot, this is extra special for them. We get a wide variety of bikes and it seems to brighten up these kids Christmas. It makes them feel good and it feels good for us to help out these kids.”

Kate Koch, a.k.a., the Bike Lady, credited her team of volunteers and the prisons for making the program possible once again, as it enters its 10th year.
“I’m often asked why I keep doing it and it’s because I can,” she said. “I have a wonderful team of volunteers and the partnerships with the prisons makes it possible. We’ll do it as long as we can. Sadly, there are always new kids entering the foster system, so we never run out of a need for bikes. I know how important it was to me as a child. I couldn’t imagine going without it in my childhood. I’m a cyclist now and I find the greatest joy when I’m on my bike. I hope the children find that same joy.”

Koch said even though the bikes are given close to Christmas, some of the families and children that receive them are of different backgrounds and that the goal is to provide a little bit of light in a tough situation.

“It’s a little bit of light in the darkness,” she said. “While we focus on giving a bike for Christmas, they belong to all faiths but a bike provides a light in darkness no matter what their culture is. There’s so much freedom and joy on those wheels.”

Koch said with foster care laws and sometimes poverty, a bike might be the only transportation these kids have.

“A bike becomes a real means of transportation,” she said. “It’s a vehicle of opportunity. It can take them to football practice or to a job. It can be a little bridge out of poverty.”

Douglas Richard, Deputy Superintendent at CJCF, said the project is a way for the youth in the facility to give back.

“This is an opportunity for our youth to make a positive impact on the lives of others in the community. By giving back to others, youth experience a sense of satisfaction and joy. This type of community service intentionally gives youth opportunities to learn about and care for the needs of others. We hope this gives the children who receive the bikes something to be happy about during this season of giving.”

One youth at the facility, who is not named due to his minor status, said he didn’t have the things he wanted growing up and this is a way to help someone else.

“This is basically helping people in need,” he said. “It is important because when I didn’t have the things that I wanted, I was looking for someone to be there for me. I feel like I can step up and make a change. I hope the kids have a happy holiday and that the bikes put a smile on their faces.”

Tataman said he it has been at least six years since Pickaway County has been receiving the donated bikes.

“We appreciate all their help and all their bikes,” he said. “It’s a really great program and we look forward to the program and working with the Bike Lady every year.”

This year, Koch said they received 1,727 requests from 44 counties, although they don’t give out the final number until Christmas Day. Last year 1,700 bikes were given to kids in the system.

“It looks positive we’ll meet the requests before Christmas,” she said.

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