

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Woman wants to comfort homeless with new socks

Sock-a-thon Nov. 29 at Angelo's



Photo by LAURA LEWIS

Theresa Tese tends to the socks she has already received as part of her newly launched nonprofit Comfort Socks program. The program was created to collect and distribute new white cotton crew socks for the homeless.

By LAURA LEWIS

SUPPLY—Theresa Tese had been praying for guidance, asking for something she could do to help others when inspiration struck.

Ensnconced in her Long Island living room a couple of winters ago, Tese looked down at her cozy new Christmas slippers and began to think about people whose feet might not be as warm that night.

“It just was in my heart, that the homeless really need this,” she said. “They go through their socks, they wear them out, in one week. It’s always a renewable need.”

So began Tese’s idea for Comfort Socks, a nonprofit recently launched locally by the newly transplanted Brunswick County resident who moved here in August with her family.

The goal, she said, is to collect donated packages of new, white, cotton crew socks to distribute to nonprofit groups that aid the homeless, poor or disaster victims.

“Of course, the hygiene benefits are obvious,” Tese said in a recent interview at her Lockwood Folly home. “But for me, what moves me, is that when you put on a pair of socks it feels so good. I just want to ease their pain a little bit. That’s why we call it Comfort Socks, because we want to offer that comfort to those who are hurting.”

Her goal is to collect 400 pairs of socks for distribution at the Homeless Veterans Stand Down next April in Wilmington, when homeless people are bused in to receive meals and “goody bags” of clean items.

“One of the things in there are socks,” Tese said. “They need 400 socks. My first 400, I’m putting aside for them.”

The Salvation Army has called, and a number of shelters also have expressed interest in the fledgling sock charity.

“I’m still evaluating how many socks I need a month in order to keep the thing going,” Tese said. “I don’t have that number yet.”

She is receiving support from her church, New Life Christian Fellowship on Stone Chimney Road in Supply, as well as from her friend Kim Radke of Boiling Spring Lakes, who is volunteering time to help Tese with establishing “sock box” collection sites.

Tese also has been working with podiatrist Bryan Satterwhite of Atlantic Foot Specialists, which is providing sock drop-off sites at its offices in Supply and Southport.

'GIVE ME SOCKS'

Already, Tese said, "The need is so much greater than I ever thought. So I need to find a way to get a steady stream of socks flowing in here."

She also has attended two meetings of the Tri-County Homeless Interagency Council in Wilmington, which connects 40 nonprofits in Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties.

"They have been such a support to me, very open to this," Tese said.

Not long ago, Tese said she met a man who told her he had once been homeless but pulled himself out of it.

"The look in his eyes was still there, the pain," she recalled. "He told me that whenever people asked what they could give him, he always told them, 'Give me socks,' because even though he was dirty and hungry, that feeling of just not having clean socks bothered him more than anything else. It just really touched my heart. He told me this in private and told me, 'You don't know the work you're doing.'"

Tese said it encouraged her and confirmed she is pursuing a worthwhile cause.

She also has been talking with representatives of Soles4Souls, a Nashville, Tenn.-based nonprofit that collects shoes for those in need.

"They do for shoes what I do for socks," Tese said. "They reached out to me with a mission—they need 5,000 socks. They get calls for socks, and they never knew what to say to everyone. But now they know about me."

Next year, Soles4Souls will conduct a 35-city tour, with podiatrists on hand to minister to the feet of the homeless.

"They measure them, then they give them brand-new shoes and they want to be able to give them brand-new socks, too," Tese said. "But they need 5,000. That's quite a tall order I won't be able to meet this time, but I want to meet it for next year so that's my goal. They want to team up with us, and if we could deliver this, it would go a long way in establishing a long-term partnership."

For now, Tese said she wants to work with churches, Girl Scout troops and merchants interested in making small donations or offering space for sock boxes that will be provided and maintained by Tese.

SOCK-A-THON

A Comfort Socks "sock-a-thon" is taking place from noon-4 p.m. next Saturday, Nov. 29, at Angelo's Pizzeria & Bistro in Shallotte Crossing shopping center. Anyone bringing a pair of socks will receive a free drink, restaurant manager James Lane confirmed.

More information about Comfort Socks is available on the Internet at www.comfortsocksonline.org. Donations also can be sent to Comfort Socks at P.O. Box 477, Supply, NC 28462 or, for ground deliveries, to 2401 Leonard Road SW, Supply, NC 28462.

With the economy at such an all-time low, perhaps people can't give as much as they'd like, Tese said. "But this is the lowest denominator. It's easy to give socks."

Representatives with agencies also have told her to get ready.

"They're seeing an increase [in need]," Tese said. "They are going to be needing them."