

AREA UPDATE

School program on Cloud 9 over balloon festival's gift

DANVILLE — Eight years ago, retired nurse **Rose Gates** launched a program to help feed children in need when they're not at school.

Four years later, her all-volunteer program, funded entirely by donations, was feeding about 180 kids identified by Danville school social workers.

Now, it's up to 400-plus, and with a team of more than 30 volunteers helping the 83-year-old Danville woman, who continuously seeks donations, writes grant applications and frugally shops for the best food prices.

On Tuesday, she received another community assist — in the form of a \$5,000 donation from Balloons Over Vermilion. The festival's board of directors sets aside money raised over the two-day event for grants to projects and programs that benefit young people in the county.

This year, the board approved four grants totaling \$10,000, with the funds presented to recipients in a Tuesday ceremony at the Vermilion County Museum. The largest grant went to Gates' Children Backpack Program.

Festival co-chairman **Jim Anderson** said the program is a genuine example of volunteers coming together to address a fundamental need for children in the community.

"We're proud to be a part of this important community effort," added co-chairman **Pat O'Shaughnessy**.

Gates said there are days that she's in awe of how the food program has evolved and how donations continue to arrive when they're needed most.

"God means for this program to go, because he keeps providing, and we are very diligent how we spend that money," she said.

Three other grant recipients were honored Tuesday, along with **Michelle Esteppe's** class from Southwest Elementary School in Tilton, chosen as the host class for the fourth annual Balloons Over Vermilion, set for July 12-13 at the Vermilion Regional Airport:

→ A \$2,500 grant went to Judith Giacoma Elementary in Westville, the host school for last year's festival. Principal **Nathan Ford** said the money will be used to provide students with material for STEM-related projects.

→ A grant of \$1,750 was presented to The Dwelling Place, a relatively new county program that advocates for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

→ \$750 will go to the Schlarman Academy archery program, which has won three state titles and continues to give opportunities to students who might not otherwise be involved in extracurricular sports, officials said.



Provided by Balloons Over Vermilion
Rose Gates, left, of Danville accepts a \$5,000 grant from Balloons Over Vermilion co-chairman Pat O'Shaughnessy on Tuesday at the Vermilion County Museum, Danville.

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