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## Holiday Turkey Surprise

by Mathilda Gregory, Editor-in-Chief

Every year, more and more people are stuck working on Thanksgiving, whether it is because they are police officers or nurses, or because the retail establishments out on the highway have decided to start Black Friday a day early. Operation Thanksgiving, a group of volunteers from all over the community, is determined to bring a little cheer into the lives of those forced to work.

“I’m lucky because Hannah always closes the Country Time on Thanksgiving,” said Mary Alice Norton, who, along with her partner, John Randolph, started the group three Thanksgivings ago. “But there sure are a lot of people who have to work. Johnny and I used to work all the time on holidays, so we thought we’d try to help out now that we don’t have to.

“We were lucky that St. Thomas Lutheran let us use their kitchen and food prep area,” added Randolph. “We needed someplace big enough to pull it all together.

Mr. Randolph isn’t kidding. The program has been so popular – both with the volunteers and the recipients – that it’s grown exponentially. On this third Thanksgiving, they expect to make over 300 sandwiches and deliver them, complete with sides of stuffing (served in little to-go containers) and pumpkin cookies.

“We don’t use deli meat or anything,” Ms. Norton hastened to assure me. “We carve up real turkeys for the sandwiches. We’ll have more than 20 turkeys here tomorrow, cooked and ready to go. Johnny and I are making two, and a lot of the other volunteers are roasting them to get ready. Mrs. Walsh is making a huge vat of stuffing for us. We’ll need somebody else to help her if we get any bigger, but she makes the best stuffing I’ve ever had in my life, and she won’t give anyone else the recipe.

“Mrs. Brady is making the cookies,” Mr. Randolph added. “She was so happy when we asked her if she wanted to help. She’ll be with her daughter on Thursday, but she wanted to do something.” He frowned. “I don’t think they’ll burn. She seemed pretty focused. But if she forgets what she’s doing, we’ll just buy some.

The group of about 30 volunteers will gather Thanksgiving morning in the St. Thomas basement to carve the turkeys and assemble the sandwiches.

“It’s a madhouse,” Mr. Randolph said. “There’s turkey everywhere. I came home and found it in my hair last year. And I was wearing plastic gloves and a cap, so I don’t know how it got there.

Once the sandwiches have been wrapped in paper and loaded into bags, along with the stuffing and cookies, any volunteers who don't have to go home fan out and deliver the unexpected gifts to people working on Thanksgiving

"We just make things until we run out of stuff," Ms. Norton explained. "Then we deliver them to everyone we can think of.

That includes the police, workers at Waterfall Manor, those staffing the local urgent care center, and the emergency vet. And, of course, all of the people stuck working in gas stations, convenience stores, and retail establishments in the immediate vicinity of Hardy Falls.

"The first year Mary Alice came in with these bags, I didn't know what she was doing," said Police Chief Jackie Kline. "I couldn't believe they'd made us Thanksgiving lunch. It was the best turkey sandwich I've ever had.

"We just want to say thank you and Happy Thanksgiving," Ms. Norton said. "And we save some of the sandwiches to give out to people who are maybe alone on the holiday. It makes them feel better.

We bet it does

UPDATE: Word on the street is that Operation Thanksgiving was a rousing success again this year. Over 267 sandwiches were delivered to those who had to work on the holiday, and another 36 were handed out to other people in town.

Pastor Williams of St Thomas said that the program has been so successful he is thinking of helping Ms. Norton and Mr. Randolph expand it so they can deliver more robust meals, complete with side dishes, to the more isolated elderly and disadvantaged members of the community, if they want to

Chief Kline got more than just a sandwich as a holiday surprise this year when she found a diamond ring in her container of stuffing. When she contacted Mr. Randolph, she discovered that Sophie Barton had taken her ring off while assembling sandwiches and her six-year-old son, Cliff, who was "helping," had apparently put it in the stuffing. She didn't notice it was missing until the bags were out for delivery.

"Ms. Barton was glad I was the one who'd gotten it," Chief Kline said, then laughed. "I think Cliff got more than a "time out" for this stunt.

When asked what she thought when she opened the stuffing container and saw a ring, Chief Kline shrugged.

"I guess I was glad I'd seen it and hadn't broken my tooth. Then I thought maybe I'd won a prize or something. But I usually feel that way here in Hardy Falls.