

## Soft place to stand

Stockton girl spearheads drive to protect city's homeless from the cold

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Pair after pair of socks sit underneath a Christmas tree at Hannah Ketcherside's home. Hannah has been asking friends and family to give her socks instead of birthday gifts so she can donate them to St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services.

Calixtro Romias/The Record

By **Jennie Rodriguez-Moore**

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STOCKTON - Hannah Ketcherside has one wish for her 11th birthday: that those who are homeless in Stockton have warm feet through the winter.

### Sock donations

Hannah's birthday sock drive collects packages of brand-new socks for St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services. Children's, men's and women's socks can be mailed to P.O. Box 1836, Stockton, CA 95201. Hannah can be contacted at Hannah sockdrive@live.com.

She thinks about how cold those who live on the street must be.

"Because some of them don't even have shoes," said Hannah, sitting next to about 300 pairs of socks she has collected under her Christmas tree. "Socks are incredibly important when it's cold."

Staunch in her mission, the sixth-grader is asking friends, relatives and anyone willing for packages of new socks in lieu of birthday gifts.

She turns 11 on Thursday.

The idea of collecting socks for the homeless was born on her seventh birthday, four years ago.

Hannah, whose mother serves on the St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services board of directors, often helps serve food at the downtown dining hall.

On one of those visits, she learned that although St. Mary's distributes 120 to 150 pairs of socks every day, sock donations are hard to obtain. St. Mary's buys most of them.

"They call them white gold at St. Mary's, because they are so precious," Hannah said.

It worries her that others struggle for basic needs.

She would rather forgo trendy clothes, fancy technology and other birthday gifts, if it means less chilly feet in the homeless community.

"I really don't want anything," Hannah said. "I really don't need anything."

Her friends didn't quite understand when she first conceived celebrating her birthday this way.

"They thought it was odd at first that I didn't want presents," Hannah said.

These days, Hannah's unselfish actions are spurring classmates at Merryhill School in the Brookside neighborhood to begin similar efforts.

One of her peers recently had a hygiene product donation drive for the homeless instead of receiving birthday gifts.

That she can inspire others is something that makes Hannah proud.

For her, it's hard to imagine feeling cold, hungry or without the comforts of a heated home.

"It's hard to even think about it," she said.

While Hannah enjoys an array of other childhood activities - golf, piano and tennis - her annual birthday sock drive is near and dear.


Each year, the goals become loftier. This year, Hannah hopes her sock drive ends with at least 1,000 pairs of socks, a much larger amount than the 60 pairs she had collected during her first campaign four years ago.

"Hannah has always been very caring and very sensitive," said her mother, Cindy Ketcherside. "She was born that way. She realizes that it's about giving back. It also teaches her friends to give back."

Contact reporter Jennie Rodriguez-Moore at (209) 943-8564 or [jrodriguez@recordnet.com](mailto:jrodriguez@recordnet.com). Visit her blog at [recordnet.com/courtsblog](http://recordnet.com/courtsblog).

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