

## A true birthday gift

By MEGAN LOISELLE

INGLESIDE – As she sat in the back seat of the car on the way home, AnaRose Hebein told her mom that she felt like she needed to do more.

The day before Easter, AnaRose's mom, Jacqui Hebein, had taken her daughter along with her to monitor a site for her work as an agency service representative for the Northern Illinois Food Bank.

On their way home, AnaRose couldn't get the thought of the younger children and adults going hungry of her mind, Jacqui said. Those were just some of the 49,000 people living below the poverty level in Lake County.

In the car, AnaRose told her mother she had an idea to help others to celebrate her birthday. She would invite her friends over to run a mobile food pantry. The food bank has refrigerated trucks that deliver perishable foods to those in need.

Jacqui said that while she saw the cost of running the mobile pantry as an obstacle, her daughter did not.

"When you empower kids, they can move mountains," she said.

It didn't take AnaRose very long to think of a solution: asking for cash donations instead of birthday gifts.

AnaRose started by writing a letter to her classmates at Saint Bede School in Ingleside, asking if they would be willing to participate in the mobile food pantry. Jacqui said the idea received overwhelming support.

**She sent out invitations as usual, but asked for cash donations to Open Arms Mission in Antioch.** On Aug. 7, 2006, her birthday, she and her friends passed out food and loaded packages into the cars. Afterwards, her friends came inside for cake and ice cream.

She repeated it again in 2007 for her 12th birthday and she plans to do it, or something like it, again.

"AnaRose has the gift of heart," Jacqui said. "We are very proud of her."

A giving heart is something the Hebeins instilled in their children through their example of volunteering in the community.

Jacqui said AnaRose's influence has also made a big impact on her friends. Several of them have volunteered at the food pantries again.

"They really loved doing it," she said.

Her friends were also excited for AnaRose when she was honored for her selflessness last Tuesday.

Saint Bede principal Michael Fosnot nominated her for the Prudential Spirit of the Community award, which is designed to honor students who make initiatives to help their community. In addition, she was honored with The President's Volunteer Service Silver Award because of her numerous volunteer hours. She also received a letter from President Bush.

"She's an outstanding person and she deserves to be recognized," Fosnot said.

He said when he received information about the Prudential award, he immediately thought of AnaRose.

In addition to her volunteering at food pantries, AnaRose is an altar server at St. Bede parish and a frequent participant in other service activities at school.

"It's just who she is," Fosnot said.

AnaRose didn't know she had received the awards until she was recognized during Mass last Tuesday by Fosnot and the Rev. Tim Fairman

"She's modest and doesn't like to be recognized but she was very honored," Fosnot said.

Fosnot said AnaRose is a role model for more than just her peers.

"This is what we as Catholics believe," Fosnot said. "She's an excellent example for all of us."

AnaRose said her faith does play a part in what she does.

"We are always taught to help others to do our best," she said.