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University of Lethbridge Bookstore’s Tree of Hope has special contribution from school children

The University of Lethbridge Bookstore has participated enthusiastically in the annual Chinook Regional Hospital Foundation’s Christmas Tree Festival, sending a message of hope and empathy to the southern Alberta community. This year, thanks to the participation of school children from throughout Lethbridge, more people will receive this message than ever before.

The Bookstore’s annual Tree of Hope will be adorned with letters of hope, penned by local school children, which will be delivered to patients of the Chinook Regional Hospital and the Green Acres Foundation.

“Building literacy, community and empathy are three priorities that we hold near and dear to our hearts at the University of Lethbridge and we could not think of a better way to highlight these values than to invite local school children to write these letters to decorate our tree,” says Rebecca Colbeck, assistant manager retail marketing of the U of L Bookstore.

Children from Dr. Gerald B. Probe Elementary School, Mike Mountain Horse Elementary School, General Stewart Elementary School, Lakeview Elementary School, Fleetwood Bawden Elementary School, G.S. Lakie Middle School and St. Paul School all participated in the letter-writing project.

For Michelle Dimnik, a learning support teacher at Dr. Probe, the initiative was a perfect fit for the school and the values they are looking to establish within their students. Shortly after the school had begun its annual International Literacy Day initiative by selecting the children’s classic, *The Giving Tree*, as its feature book, Colbeck approached them about participating in the Tree of Hope project.

“We’d just picked this beautiful book that celebrates the spirit of giving and then along comes Becky to ask us if we’d like to be involved in the tree festival,” says Dimnik. “This was an opportunity to take giving to another level in our building. And for students to be able to write letters of hope to people who might need it was a way to help them look

beyond themselves and really outside of our building, because it's truly a community project."

Dimnik says the entire school, from kindergarten classes through to Grade 5, participated in the project, producing close to 500 letters.

"A lot of inspirational messages have come out of this from our students and I think they have a pretty good understanding of how people might feel when they are in the hospital or in a long-term care setting," she says. "We feel very fortunate to be asked to be involved in a project like this, and it's great that it gets our kids reading and writing and really giving to the community."

In addition to the letters of hope, the Bookstore tree will be adorned with the usual assortment of U of L goodies, including more than \$1,200 worth of books, Bookstore gift cards, Faculty of Fine Arts theatre and concert tickets, Sport and Recreation Services climbing wall or swimming party packages, summer camp admissions and Jr. Herd memberships to follow Pronghorn Athletics teams.

"We always put a lot of thought and effort into creating our Tree of Hope, as I'm sure everyone who participates in this festival does," says Colbeck. "We're really excited to include these letters of hope this year, along with more than \$1,900 worth of items that anyone can enjoy."

The 23rd Annual Chinook Regional Hospital Foundation Christmas Tree Festival begins with free public viewings in the Canadian Western Bank Lounge at the Enmax Centre November 22-24. The Christmas Tree Festival Gala & Auction, which raises funds for state-of-the-art health care equipment, vital programs and special projects at the Chinook Regional Hospital, takes place Wednesday, Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m.

For more information, visit http://www.crhfoundation.ca/events/tree_festival.php.

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