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**J.E.J. Moore Middle Community Raises Over \$600 to Help Make
Christmas Season Bright for Area Seniors**

Over 100 gift bags to be given to seniors at Richmond long-term care facility

PRINCE GEORGE, Va. - Students and staff at J.E.J. Moore Middle School came together to help make Christmas memorable for area seniors as COVID-19 restrictions mean some face the prospect of not having visitors or gifts during the holiday season.

Over the last few weeks, Moore's school community united to raise money that would ultimately be used to create over 100 gift bags for seniors living at a Richmond long-term care facility. The project's genesis came from one of the school's speech pathologists, Katie Christo, who wanted to make sure senior residents know they're loved and aren't forgotten.

"My mom won't accept Christmas gifts any longer, and she wants donations made to help the community instead," Christo shared. "The senior population holds a special place in my heart, so I reached out to the long-term care facility to see if we could provide gifts to a couple of residents without visitors."

What started as a small gesture quickly snowballed into something larger as Moore Middle School teacher Kimberly Scruggs and the multiple disabilities class, along with the school's Student Council Advisory joined in, helping to raise enough money to provide every resident at the facility with a gift. According to Christo and Scruggs, nearly \$630 was raised thanks to the school community's generosity and helped to create the bags that will be distributed to the center's 107 senior citizens.

Inside each Christmas-themed gift bag, coloring books, personal care items, games, socks, gloves, and more are included. Moore Middle students' handmade Christmas cards are paired with the gifts, each adorned with holiday drawings and other elements celebrating the season. This event also served as a learning experience for students as they prepared each bag for its eventual delivery.

"For our Life Skills group, this was a great opportunity for the students to learn how to sort and pack items properly, and follow directions, as well," Scruggs said.

Moore Middle School Principal Robert Knowles said he was moved by the outpouring of support from the school community for the cause.

"What I love about this is that the whole school community came together and embraced this," Knowles said. "I was so proud of how everyone united to support this wonderful cause and to see the kids get involved in their community. Mrs. Christo and Mrs. Scruggs did a fantastic job. These outstanding students and teachers should be celebrated for the hard work they've done and the selflessness it takes to do this."

For many seniors living in long-term care or similar facilities, the approaching holiday season likely means not seeing friends and family due to COVID-19 and limitations on outside visitors. Through the gifts being shared by the Moore community, the Christmas season might be just a bit brighter for some.

"When our students come to school, it isn't only about the ABCs and 123s; it's also about finding ways to give back to our community, and I love how the Moore family went above and beyond for this," Principal Knowles said.

"We just want to thank everyone who helped because we would not have been able to make so many presents with so many items in them without all of the monetary support and donations we received," Christo said. "This hasn't been the brightest year, so it is nice to end the year in this way before we leave for Christmas break."

The bags crafted by Moore's students will be taken and distributed to those seniors at the Richmond long-term care facility in time for Christmas.