A DRIVE FOR HOLIDAY HELP



CHRISTOPHER DOLAN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

COLTS driver Jeff Howells, left, and his wife, Mary, stand near gifts purchased for needy families with donations from bus drivers and other COLTS employees at their Scranton home on Dec. 12.

COLTS driver Jeff Howells thought the transit system should give back. His coworkers took care of the rest

BY DAVID SINGLETON STAFF WRITER

Jeff Howells came up with the idea, but the County of Lackawanna Transit System driver says the generosity of his coworkers made it happen.

Four families that rely on COLTS to get a parent or head of household to work will enjoy a merrier Christmas after Howells' fellow drivers and other employees chipped in \$2,500 this year to buy gifts for their children.

"Some of them have nothing, and we have decent jobs," said Howells, 55, Scranton, a COLTS driver for 18 years.



More than 30 COLTS employees — fixed-route and shared-ride drivers and members of the office staff — contributed to the effort, each giving at least \$5 a month for 10 months, How-

ells said. NET Credit Union kicked in \$500 in gift cards, and COLTS itself donated several 31-day bus passes.

Howells said the thought of employees helping COLTS passengers in need grew out Christmas gifts purchased by COLTS driver Jeff Howells and his wife, Mary, with donations from bus drivers and other COLTS employees are wrapped Dec. 12 on their dining room table at their Scranton home.

> CHRISTOPHER DOLAN STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

of incidents from Christmases past.

During the holiday season in 2018, after a single mother who was one of Howells'

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regular passengers had stolen by porch pirates, How-Christmas gifts for her child

ells and his wife, Mary bought couple that uses COLTS lost presents to replace them. Last year, Howells said, a

donated \$1,100 to replace the dropped his wallet on the bus to spend on rent and to buy \$1,100 — money they planned bought gifts for the children. cash and then he and wife also dren — when the husband Howells said COLTS drivers

and help additional families. more formal this year by ask ing his coworkers to commit

that can't afford a car and are good, hardworking families free," Howells said. "They are not asking for anything for paying their fares. They're that are struggling. They are

ticipating in the project. ees were excited about paroffice at COLTS, said employin the Shared Ride Program Beth Zangardi, who works

ful act of kindness," she said. "It turned out to be a beauti-

mend families, Howells said. es, they were asked to recomthe people who ride their bus-Because the drivers know

single mother with a teenage son from Blakely who loads her bicycle on the front of the One recipient this year is a Christmas gifts for their chil

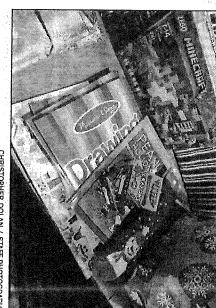
hoped to raise more money to a monthly donation, he in making the effort a little

ust making ends meet." "We see people every day bus to go to her job in Dickson

chased for six children who equipped with lights, he said is receiving is a new bicycle City but then rides the bike out of work, Howells said. She has been hit twice by cars. nome at night when she gets Gifts also have been pur-Among the gifts her family

couple hadn't stepped up. dren placed in foster care if the split up and the younger chilwere taken in by an aunt and the family would have been year, Howells said. It was likely aunt's sister — died earlier this uncle after their mother — the

bus forever," Howells said and "have been riding wife work in low-paying jobs Both the husband and the



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their Scranton home on Dec. 12. Christmas gifts on the Howells' dining room table at

o'clock at night," he said. "We work and they are not getting bus every morning at 6 to go to home until probably almost 6 "These two people get on the

dropped off on Christmas gifts and the rest will be Christmas to deliver a few will make a visit to some of want to make it nice for them." the recipients' homes before Howells said Santa Claus

agam next year. He plans to do it all over

need to pay it forward to the Howells said. people we see every day," "To me, it's kind of like we

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