

IT'S A WRAP

Retirees wrap gifts for recently homeless



Photos by Pat Christman

Jane Petrie (left) and Sylvia Willmott work on wrapping a present for a Partners for Affordable Housing client Tuesday at Oak Terrace Senior Living.

Donations accepted until Dec. 28

By Brian Arola
barola@mankatofreepress.com

Residents at Oak Terrace and other retirement communities may not be able to volunteer as much as they used to, but the holiday season brings volunteering opportunities to them.

Oak Terrace is one of three independent living communities wrapping gifts this week for Partners for Affordable Housing clients who've newly found housing. Freedom Home Care also is partnering with the nonprofit and retirement communities to collect toiletries and essentials for the families.

The volunteers ensure Christmas shopping expenses don't become barriers to remaining in stable housing, said Gabriell Larson, transitional housing advocate at Partners.

"This way instead of spending money on gifts they can put it toward rent that keeps them housed, which is our goal and mission," she said.

Gifted items include dish sets, toys, art kits and stuffed animals. Margaret Lewellyn, after finishing wrapping with a group of ladies, called the opportunity a "privilege." "This is one thing we can do," she said. "We can't do a lot of (volunteering), but we can do this, and we're privileged to do it."

Jane Petrie used to love volunteering at MRCI's thrift store. She's homebound now, though, meaning she can't do so anymore.

"It's the only time I can volunteer now," she said of the gift wrapping.

The group Tuesday could be



Gifts wrapped by residents at area retirement communities will be distributed to families who recently experienced homelessness. The items include games, movies, toys and dish sets among other gifts.

considered gift-wrapping experts given their years of experience doing so for loved ones. But, as Pat Coyle and Mary Braam noted, nowadays most of them send cards with checks or gift certificates to their now grown-up relatives.

"We certainly have a lot of experience," Coyle said. "And I don't think any of us would have very many now to wrap."

The gift-wrapping partnership began in 2014 in recognition of retirees in the Mankato area who want to remain engaged in their communities, said Christine Nessler of Freedom Home Care.

"There's a wealth of people that are looking for opportunities to give back, but just might not have the mobility or accessibility to get out

and do it," she said.

The wrapped gifts will be distributed to clients in Partners' transitional housing, long-term homeless and rapid rehousing programs. Clients staying in the shelter receive gifts through the Holiday Sharing Tree effort, as their mobility makes it hard to know whether they'll still be in the shelter by the time the gifts are distributed.

Primrose Retirement Community and New Perspective Senior Living joined Oak Terrace in the gift wrapping and toiletry drives. Donors can drop off soaps, lotions, toothbrushes, deodorant and feminine hygiene products at any of the three retirement communities or at Freedom Home Care or Partners for Affordable Housing through Dec. 28.