

Calendar girl helps the kids: Teen uses art skills to assist orphans

By Kathy Uek / News Staff Writer
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SUDBURY -- Orphans from the Little Samaritan Mission in Russia touched Hayley VanSteenburg's heart when she was 7 years old. The children sang at her church, Grace Chapel in Lexington.

"That's when I learned about their situation that they usually only have bread for dinner," said VanSteenburg, now 17. "Sometimes when they get a piece of fruit, that's really exciting for them. It really impacted me. They were so courageous standing up there. They were happy, well-rounded people and, at the time, they had so little."

Ten years later, orphans in the republic of Moldova, Romania and Siberia still often lack food, warm clothing and medicine. The shortage of coal used to heat the orphanages in the long cold winters only exacerbates the problem.

Over the years, VanSteenburg has participated in many projects to help the orphans. Her latest fund-raiser is more personal.

VanSteenburg, who has her sights set on art school, has put together a collection of her illustrations to make a 13-month calendar, which she sells at local stores including Frugal Flowers in Sudbury and Verrill Farms in Concord.

"I did the illustrations in different mediums including pastel, oil, pencil, acrylic and charcoal," said VanSteenburg. "Then I had them professionally photographed, a graphic designer put together the calendar and the printer reproduced them."

And the vendors with whom VanSteenburg worked were so impressed, they sell the calendars at their studios.

"We thought she was fantastic and was doing great things with this calendar," said **Lynne Damianos of Damianos Photography** in Framingham. "I was stunned she was only a junior. When I saw her art work, I was blown away."

Lisa Thompson, a graphic artist in Framingham, said VanSteenburg is an All-American teen.

"She's beautiful, talented, athletic and sweet and committed to this social cause in this day and age when teens can get a bad rap for being totally absorbed," said Thompson. "I was struck by her talent and her ease with different mediums."

Her parents also helped with the fund-raiser. Because they donated all the printing costs, all the proceeds from the calendars will go directly to the mission.

A portfolio prep course also helped. "I took the course so I could get pieces together for college so work from school went into that, too," she said.

So far, VanSteenburg has raised more than \$3,000 from calendar sales and stores are still selling them.

"Selling calendars during the holiday season is a good way to make people aware of the cause," said VanSteenburg. "It's gaining momentum. More people learned and heard about it and it took off."

At age 10, the Sudbury resident began saving her baby sitting money to donate to the Little Samaritan Mission.

"I'd save up and after a few months, I'd make a donation of whatever I could," she said.

Two years later, VanSteenburg made illustrated gift tags, sold them at a local craft fair at Haynes Elementary School in Sudbury and made more than \$200.

"Two of the illustrations were of the orphans from Russia," said VanSteenburg.

At 14, VanSteenburg took her Backpack Project to school and with 20 fellow students bought backpacks and filled them with school supplies for the children.

Recently, the Lincoln-Sudbury junior and 25 fellow students also participated in the "Face of a Child Project." With a photo of a child and the height and clothing size provided by the Little Samaritan Mission, students purchased fleece blankets, warm clothing and shoes. For many, it was the first time the orphaned children received a gift with their name on it. In the gift packages, the students included a photo of themselves.

"The children put the picture on their bedpost and call you their family from America," said VanSteenburg.

The best part of fund-raising efforts for VanSteenburg is knowing she can help change lives.

"Even sending like \$20 makes a difference," she said. "I'm really glad I've had as much support. It's overwhelming."

Busy with ice hockey, lacrosse and school work, VanSteenburg hopes to take a trip to Russia after college with her church and visit the children again.

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