

Helping people is definitely her bag

Burlington woman sends handy packets to those in need

The 10,000 care packages Wendy Hagar has sent to more than 30 countries in the past 30 months come in gym bags of many colours.

She loosens the drawstring on one similar to those that have gone to needy kids or orphans in Russia, China, Guatemala and Sierra Leone. Some have gone to West River, Labrador, or to the hard streets of east Vancouver and Toronto.

Out spills a variety of useful items, along with a few that are just meant for fun: a washcloth, soap, toothbrush and paste, tissues, mitts, balloons, baseball cap, crayons, pencils and a sharpener, a hacky-sack, elastic bracelet, comb, Band-Aids and a small toy dog.

She's also sent bags filled with receiving blankets and other baby-care items. Old women in Ukraine received a fresh flannel nightgown, socks, clean underwear and toiletries. Working poor men get a shaver, new clothes and sometimes a penknife.

"My house has been transformed into a factory," says Ha-

gar, of Burlington, Ont. "I have six sewing machines and a patient husband and children."

She was in Sherwood Park last week visiting her sister and father. She is also spreading the word of her Sew on Fire Ministries in Western Canada, speaking to schools and church groups.

She talks in rapid-fire phrases, enthusiastically describing how the idea for the bags came to her while she was listening to a missionary describe his experiences in Russia.

"I really believe that morning when I was putting an offering in the envelope, the guy spoke into my spirit," she says.

Soon after, the executive assistant and mother of two was sewing bags and filling them with the things she thought people would need.

Everything is donated, she says. In the beginning, she bought on faith. She would go to a store, tell them what she wanted and usually walked away with an outstanding deal or outright donations.

"Every dime I squeeze to the max," she says. "I'll go to stores

EDMONTON INSIDE & OUT

by Jeff Holubitsky

HOW TO HELP

Hagar is always looking for more donations of items including cloth for the bags, baseball caps, wool, face cloths and even bicycles. She can be reached at 805-333-5722 or at sewonfire@yahoo.ca

and say "These are going to orphanages. What's the best deal?"

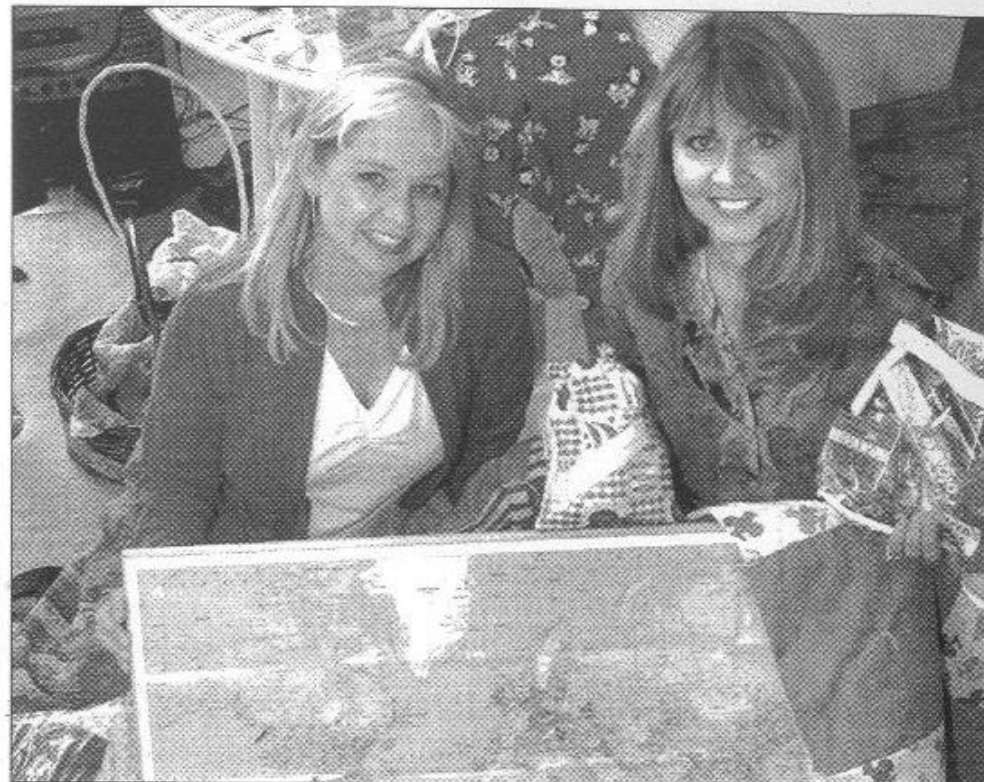
Word of her mission also spread beyond her own Pentecostal church.

"United, Lutheran, Baptist: it's really amazing how many people have come on side," she says.

Any group going to a poor country for charity is welcome. She will customize bags according to the needs of an area and will give each person travelling to that country two hockey bags filled with 40 or more of her small care bags.

People are often surprised that the bags come at no cost, she says. She relies on a small army of volunteers for rounding up goods, sewing, knitting and packing.

She's also careful not to send junk. While most of the stuff is the excess of our wealthy society, Ha-



LARRY WONG, THE J
Wendy Hagar, left, and her sister Brenda Clark pore over a map to decide where to send their thoughtfully packed bags next. They anticipate the needs of the recipients and make sure all contents are useful and

gar makes sure that donated boots are wearable and all clothes are nearly new, if not new.

"Guess how many verses about helping the poor there are in the Bible?" she asks. "There are 2,300, so it must be good advice."

If you know of any interesting people, places or activities in the Edmonton area — from the serious to the ridiculous — we'd love to hear from you. Please send us your suggestions by phoning us at 498-5862, fax 429-5500 or e-mail msadava@thejournal.southam.ca

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