

## ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST CATHOLIC SCHOOL

# School folds pajama day into pajamas for seniors

By David Sedeño  
The Texas Catholic

**PLANO**—A couple of hundred low-income seniors in North Texas nursing homes will be a bit warmer this Christmas and winter, thanks to a St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic School student who spearheaded an effort to turn an otherwise school Polar Express Day into a pajama-giving party.

Last summer, St. Mark eighth-grader Will Ives volunteered with a group called Pajamas for Seniors, a non-profit organized by Jo Alch, a registered nurse who also owns an in-home health care agency. She had worked as a hospice nurse for many years and began giving pajamas to low-income patients who were in need.

Ives took the pajamas for seniors idea to school administrators.

"I thought 'Pajamas for Seniors' and 'Pajama Day' and I said we might as well combine the two," Ives said. "And I got the school involved because we are a Catholic school and we try to help our neighbors and what better way to do that than to incorporate charity

into one of our yearly events."

So, on Dec. 12, students at St. Mark went to class in pajamas, some, including teachers and staff, with color-coordinated outfits and robes, and others in T-shirts and sweatpants, among other styles. Many of them also brought a new pair of unwrapped pajamas for seniors as part of the school's monthly service project.

Pam Steinkirchner, the assistant principal, said that students learned about the project and its importance, noting that there are thousands of low-income seniors in nursing facilities who receive no more than \$60 a month in benefits for their basic needs.

"This is extremely important in terms of giving to other people outside of our community because what they see is that they can help," she said. "When everybody joins together and does a little bit we can make a great difference in the world, so they joined together and brought pajamas for seniors in need."

Alch said that St. Mark students collected more than 250 pairs of pajamas for seniors that will be distributed in time for Christmas.

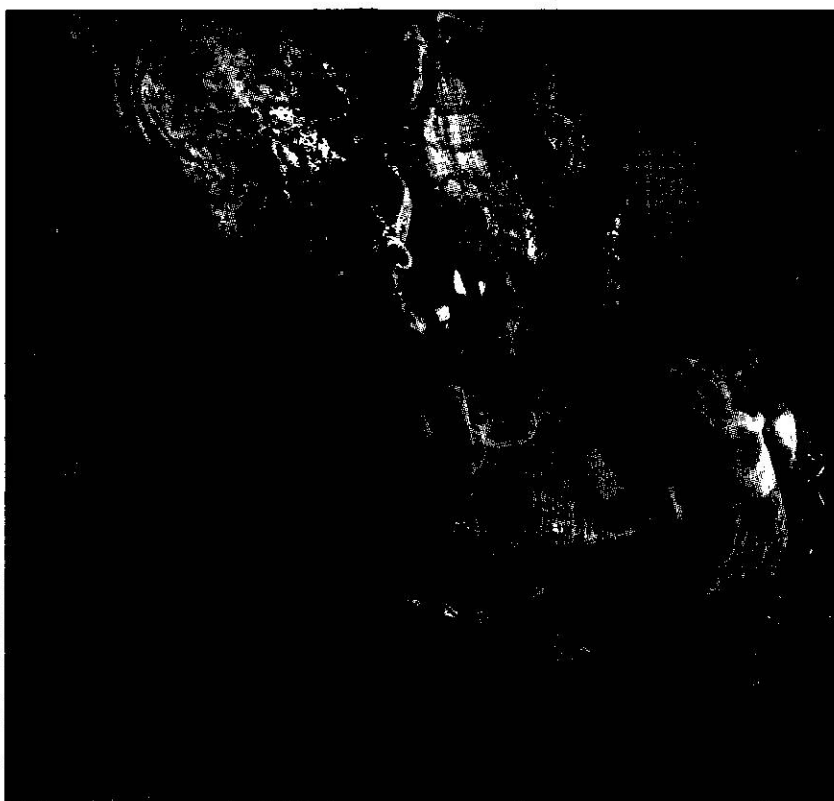
In the past five years, Pajamas for Seniors has collected more than 20,000 pairs of pajamas for needy seniors, she said.

She said there are tens of thousands of seniors in nursing facilities throughout North Texas with little to no money and with few visitors.

"This is how we can be the hands and feet of Jesus by giving a pair of pajamas and make someone feel loved and special," Alch said. "Just because they are old they don't stop having needs and that emotional need is so key to fulfill and to making someone feel special, loved and cared for."

Steinkirchner said the school is proud of Ives because his actions reflect what the school is trying to teach students through monthly service projects.

"For our students to come to us with service projects they want to get involved with and to get our school to get involved in that even says more because our goal of trying to get everyone to think of 'how I can give back to the community' matters and they are doing it."



Eighth-grader Will Ives poses with the stack of pajamas collected for senior citizens at St. Mark Catholic School in Plano on Dec. 16.

RON HEFLIN/Special Contributor