

Life is like a two-way street for Crystal Locke

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As detailed in a recent edition of The Towne Crier, Crystal Locke is undergoing a myriad of life threatening health problems. She needs a double-lung transplant to survive. Every day for her is like a roller coaster ride as she awaits word of availability of a lung that will match her body system. She is currently being evaluated in the testing phase to determine if she will be placed on a waiting list for a donated lung.

It's not easy. Over 100,000 people in this country are waiting for a transplant; some 2,000 of them needing lungs. If she makes it to a waiting list, there are no guarantees how long she will need to wait to get one. Then a battle to survive begins anew.

Yet with all this adversity, Crystal Locke is full of optimism-- and a spirit overflowing with a desire to help others. Take December 10, for example. On that day, Crystal and her husband, Mike, went to the Tractor Supply store located on Rt. 33-A between Lancaster and Carroll, and did some shopping. Not for themselves, their family, or the animals in their care (they have 3 dogs they rescued, and 9 cats).

Up and down the aisles they traveled, filling their cart with purchases. Not just one cart, but THREE carts. What were they buying? 12 cans of "super supper" cat food; 16 cans of salmon cat food; 16 cans of chicken; two 20 pound bags of dog biscuits; ten 5-pound bags of dog biscuits; three 20-pound bags of hi-protein dog food; three 20-pound bags of "bites & bones" dog food; three 15-pound bags of puppy chow; and fourteen 16-pound bags of cat chow.

Total price of the Lancaster couple's "buying spree"--\$373.63. And they gave it all away to the pet food drive being conducted by Fairfield County Cares!

"My husband and I love pets," Crystal says as she describes her Christmas gift to less fortunate dogs and cats. She then told how her husband (an over-the-road truck driver), who was making a delivery in San Antonio, TX, when he came upon 2 puppies that had been left for dead. He put them in his truck and drove them back home here in Fairfield County. That was three years ago, and the dogs are

still with Crystal and Mike--and doing just fine. "If I was healthy, I would start a rescue group and save as many pets as I could," Crystal declares.

The pet food drive has been conducted in Fairfield County since last March when a Meals-on-Wheels volunteer observed that some needy shut-ins and handicapped people were sharing their food allotments with their furry companions because they couldn't afford to buy pet food.

Fairfield County CARES sprung into action, and contacted social service agencies assisting needy families in our area. Participating in the program are agencies such as Lutheran Social Services, the Salvation Army, Community Action, Maywood Mission, Meals-on-Wheels, and others in outlying communities. They agreed to divide the collections and distribute it to their clients on a "need" basis.

Next, a large group of local businesses were contacted, and asked to place a collection box in their stores or offices where people could donate pet food purchases. Currently, there are collection locations in Amanda, Millersport, Canal Winchester, Pickerington, Pleasantville, and 14 places in the Lancaster area. A complete list of locations where people can leave pet food donations is on the web site: www.fairfieldcountycares.org. It includes places such as food stores, veterinary offices, pet food suppliers, banks, hardware stores, all locations of the Fairfield County Library system; and even a spa. Cash donations are welcomed, and should be mailed to: Fairfield County Cares, P.O. Box 844, Lancaster, OH 43130. All funds are used to purchase pet food for local food pantries and Meals on Wheels.

Since the program began, thousands of pounds of pet food have been donated, and distributed to needy and unemployed families in Fairfield County. The program was originally slated to operate just two months. But the economy worsened, unemployment rose, and the number of families seeking emergency assistance continued to grow. The people of Fairfield County have responded in a superb manner; and the donations continue to arrive. Fairfield County Cares has pledged to continue the program as long as there is a need.

Thanks to folks like Crystal and Mike Locke and other generous people of Fairfield County for making this all possible!