



Dirtbags delight with new bikes

Samantha Yale Scroggin and Bo Poertner/Staff Writers | Posted: Sunday, December 20, 2009 12:00 am

Angelica Wankowski still has training wheels on her bicycle, but doesn't intend to use them for long.

The 8-year-old who lives with her family on Vandenberg Air Force Base is the proud owner of a brand-new pink bike with a matching helmet, thanks to the generosity of the Village Dirtbags, a local mountain-biking team.

Her old, broken bike with training wheels will fall by the wayside.

"I'm going to learn from my brother, the master," she said of her plan to start to ride without training wheels.

Angelica was tickled pink by the look of the bike.

"I think this is a wonderful color and style," she added.

The three Wankowski siblings were among 102 children with parents stationed at Vandenberg Air Force Base, many of them deployed overseas, to receive new bicycles Saturday in Lompoc.

The Village Dirtbags gave away the bikes, which were purchased with community donations, at Bicycles Unlimited, 660 North H St.

"Everybody who put in for a bike got a bike," said team member Roger McConnell.

The parking lot in front of Bicycles Unlimited was a happy, bustling scene Saturday morning as Village Dirtbags members darted from child to child, adjusting helmets and ensuring bikes fit properly.

Christmas music played, and cameras snapped everywhere, capturing images of beaming children — and some unsteady — on top of their new bikes.

Jodie Wankowski, Angelica's mother and wife of Capt. Timothy Wankowski, who is currently deployed to Iraq for a six-month stay, said the show of thanks for the sacrifice of families who experience deployment was heartening.

"This just makes them feel their dad's job is appreciated," Wankowski said of her children. "It's nice all the stores in the area came and donated," she added.

Tech. Sgt. Eric Faulkenberry and his wife, Rosalie, were both on hand Saturday to watch their three kids receive bikes.

Rosalie, who lives on base with her family and helped spread the word about the bike program, said the event was "incredibly wonderful."

Her youngest daughter, 3-year-old Jasmine, got her first bicycle Saturday, and the older two children were given replacements for bikes that were too small. "They were in need of a new one, because they outgrew the old ones," Rosalie said.

For the first time, Dirtbag team members also raised \$6,000 themselves to buy three custom-made bicycles for disabled veterans through VA Loma Linda Healthcare, according to McConnell.

Two of them will be given to veterans in Loma Linda, the third will be used as a demonstration bike for veterans to test, McConnell said.

The custom-made bikes were purchased at Lightning Cycles, 312 Ninth St. in Lompoc.

Major contributors included the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (12 bikes), Rob Holdsambeck (10 bikes) and a third-grade class at Crestview Elementary School (seven bikes).