

**2004-12-20 Interfaith AIDS Ministry, clients grateful for gifts By: Robin De Merell
NEWS-TIMES CORRESPONDENT**



The News-Times/Chris Ware, Gabriela Ambrose of Interfaith AIDS Ministry in Danbury has been collecting gifts for 68 local families affected by HIV and AIDS.

DANBURY – Gabriela Ambrose says the Danbury region understands the spirit of giving – so much so that she has collected more than 500 gifts for families in need.

As the director of clients and volunteers for Interfaith AIDS Ministry in Danbury, Ambrose is making sure that 68 local families affected by HIV and AIDS will have a Merry Christmas – and local residents are helping.

"There's a lot of generosity out there," said Ambrose, a long-time Danbury resident. "It's amazing how the public supports the social services agencies. We live by donations. If you come to my office right now, it's already full of toys."

Interfaith AIDS offers unconditional physical and emotional support for people and their families affected by HIV and AIDS.

"We like to provide them with a regular Thanksgiving dinner and a holiday dinner for Christmas," Ambrose said. "We like them to receive three presents for each person, but sometimes it's not possible. This year everyone will receive a minimum of three presents each."

The large number of presents is, in part, due to a toy drive sponsored by Triangles Cafe in Danbury, which collected more than 500 toys this year.

"Most of our clients are so grateful, they write thank-you notes. Kids go completely crazy because they see presents and you know, Christmas is for children," Ambrose said. "That's what we do – make people happy and we are able to do that because of the generosity of people in Danbury and the surrounding towns."

Ambrose, a Mexican native in her 40s, is married with

four children and one grandchild. She has been at her full-time paid position for the past six years and seems to love every minute. She got involved with the organization after someone she knew contracted AIDS. "Everyone who works in this field has some attachment to the virus, a friend, a relative," Ambrose said.

Because the response was so great this year, the gifts are being dropped off and picked up at the United Jewish Center, rather than the organization's location at 46 Main Street.

Silvio Soares, the ministry's coordinator of food and delivery, said he sees first-hand how happy the donations make people who are living with AIDS. "People are very thankful," Soares said. "They get very happy because some people don't have family around and they are very sick – they need that contact."

Ambrose said for her the best part is how a horrible disease can bring the best out of people. "It's seeing how many people are willing to help needy families and the gratefulness of the families," Ambrose said. "Not everything is sad with AIDS. A lot of wonderful things come out of it. A lot of people concentrate on the disease, but people with the disease are so grateful."