

## Donations Assist World's Disabled

Ernie Barnes of The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens in Fresno, Calif., used to ride his bicycle with an attached wagon around the campus to collect donations for the community thrift store he ran with his wife, Betty.

Among the donated clothes and household goods, he would sometimes find such items as canes and walkers and set them aside. On weekends, he would go to nearby flea markets and look for more assistive devices — wheelchairs, crutches and the like — that could be restored to top condition. Riding around on his bicycle, Barnes was a driving force behind his community's wheelchair donation drive. The effort began when Chaplain Nancy Wilson-Jen brought David Hooker to the campus in the fall of 2008. Hooker is regional coordinator of Joni and Friends, a nonprofit organization started by Joni Eareckson Tada, who became a paraplegic after a diving accident in her teens. Hooker talked with residents about Wheels for the World, a ministry through which Joni and Friends collects and refurbishes wheelchairs, walkers, canes and crutches and delivers them to individuals with disabilities in the developing world.

Aid organizations consider this population — which totals about 400 million worldwide — to be the very poorest of the poor. In developing countries, people with disabilities often can't afford the equipment that would allow them to work, attend school and join others for recreation and worship. Consequently, they are often isolated, impoverished and discriminated against.

The response from The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens was enthusiastic and receptive, Hooker says. "Both residents and staff contributed material goods or money," says Wilson-Jen of that initial drive. Ernie and Betty Barnes encouraged their neighbors to give, and Ernie Barnes personally rounded up all the devices he could find. Team members in the community's assisted living and memory support programs and the health center donated used items they had in storage. At a service on the evening before Thanksgiving 2008, says Wilson-Jen, "the donations were dedicated to the Lord and taken by Joni and Friends."

Wheels for the World delivers the donations to Taft Correctional Institution in Taft, Calif., where a work force refurbishes and packs the equipment for shipment to one of 17 countries overseas. In-country volunteers custom fit each wheelchair to its recipient and provide training in its use and upkeep.

Volunteers also give each recipient a Bible, give talks about the needs of disabled people and in some cases improve access to churches, homes and other local buildings.

Ernie and Betty Barnes have since passed away, but their community's dedication to the Wheels for the World project continues. In 2009, The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens donated \$10,000 in cash and goods to the ministry. Lynda Gray, assisted living activity coordinator, gathers items no longer needed by residents of The Grove, the community's memory support program, and The Lodge assisted living program. "Last year, we gave 15 wheelchairs and six nice walkers," she says, adding that they have also donated shower seats. "The guy from Joni and Friends had to come back twice with his pickup." Wheels for the World receives calls from The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens every three to four months saying items are ready for pickup, Hooker says. "It's because of people like the residents of San Joaquin Gardens that we're able to help folks in other countries who otherwise couldn't afford this equipment."

Residents themselves also reap benefits from charitable projects like this one, says Wilson-Jen. "Having special guests each year who represent various groups that serve the needy keeps them aware and generous. Both of those attributes are critical to their spiritual, moral and emotional health."