

Special Delivery **By: Gary Sledge**

Ten-year-old Riley Christensen and her mother, Lynn, were huddled in front of the family computer, checking out models and prices of bikes. “Let’s pick one out for Dad’s birthday,” Christensen suggested to her daughter.

As Christensen scrolled down the home page of the Bike Rack, a shop in their town of St. Charles, Illinois, a video link for Project Mobility caught her eye. She clicked on it out of curiosity. The clip told how Bike Rack co-owner Hal Honeyman had created an organization to provide specially engineered bicycles to people with disabilities. It showed the happy faces of those who were now riding them—accident victims, injured veterans, and children with disabilities, including Hal’s own son, who had been born with cerebral palsy.

“I’m going to buy a bike for one of those kids,” Riley told her mother. Two days later, she showed Christensen a letter she had written asking for donations: “I think it’s amazing for a guy to make bikes for kids who can’t walk,” the letter said. “I saw how happy a boy was when he got one ... I’m writing to ask for your help.”

Christensen was blown away by her daughter’s effort, but doubts quickly emerged. The cost of just one of those special bikes could be as high as \$4,000. Riley could never raise the money. Nonetheless, her letter went out to 75 relatives and friends. Within three days, checks and cash began arriving. Then word got around about Riley’s campaign, and as Christmas neared, more and more donations rolled in. The teen ultimately raised more than \$12,000, enough to pay for seven bikes.

Last Christmas Eve, Riley pulled on a Santa hat and delivered the bicycles to three of the lucky kids: Ava, a 13-year-old girl with spina bifida; Jenny, a 15-year-old girl with cerebral palsy; and Rose, a 4-year-old girl with a rare genetic disorder. “This is the best Christmas I ever had,” said Riley.

She and Ava have since ridden together. “When I ride, I like to go fast, get sweaty, and feel the breeze,” Riley says. “So does Ava. She pumps with her arms, not her feet, but she really flies.”

Riley is determined to keep her campaign going every holiday season. “I want kids to feel the wind in their faces,” she says.

