



Photo submitted

Showing gifts and greeting cards handed out to senior citizens are (front row, from left) Brian Carlson, Olean Medical Group chief operating officer, Boardmanville students Brian Smith and Cameron Howard, and Boardmanville teacher Marcia Storch. In back (from left) are student Thomas Kirk, Cattaraugus County Legislator Linda Witte, and student Sarah Negron.

## Kind hearts bring extra warmth to Olean-area senior citizens

OLEAN — With the rising costs of heating bills and the limitations of the county's home-heating assistance program, Cattaraugus County Legislator Linda Witte approached the Olean Medical Group with an old-fashioned idea for helping senior citizens stay warm this winter.

She wanted to distribute blankets to the elderly in the area, thinking the extra layer would offset the cold as the cost-conscious seniors lowered their thermostats a few degrees.

Brian Carlson, Olean Medical Group's chief operating officer, embraced the idea and put the call out through the building for donations of blankets, soups, and fruit.

Within days, the center's physicians and staff had collected enough goods to distribute to 100 senior citizens in the area.

"Mrs. Witte recognized that our community does a great deal for our youth with toy drives and the Gift Tree and she felt that something could be done for our older population. Many live alone and many don't

have family in the area," said Tricia Henzel, Olean Medical Group's director of recruitment and marketing.

By the end of this week, the seniors will not only have received a new blanket with a few cans of soup and fruit, but attached to each package was a card created by a student at Boardmanville Elementary School in Olean.

The medical group and Boardmanville are partners in education, and throughout the year they collaborate on projects.

"This was special and the children were most enthusiastic," said Mrs. Henzel. "Their cards were bright and cheerful."

Cherianne Wold, director of the Cattaraugus County Department of the Aging, said the project is a welcome bit of warmth in this cold winter season.

"Too often the elderly get overlooked," said Ms. Wold. "Sometimes all that our seniors need is a hug or a gesture of love like this. The level of generosity that I see in this com-

munity goes above and beyond what I have seen in other places."

She paused and added, "That's what this season is all about."

Mr. Carlson said he was pleased that the Medical Group pulled the project together in a week's time.

"I am proud of the effort from our physicians and staff," he said. "I'd like to thank Mrs. Witte and everyone involved who made this possible."

The Olean Medical Group is located on Main Street, next to Olean General Hospital.

It has satellite offices in Cuba, Franklinville, and Ellicottville.