

**ROCHELLE RILEY****Schools get gifts from a real St. Nick**

Here's how it usually works. Vandals break into a school and destroy, not steal, but just tear up valuable teaching

tools: musical instruments, computers, books. In most cases, the students spend the rest of the year without those resources, their academic experience irreparably damaged.

But here's how it worked when Dr. James Payne heard about Dixon Elementary's computers being vandalized last August.

Payne called Comcast, because he had gotten used computers from the company before, and asked for more. Comcast, in the middle of a computer upgrade, had 270 used ones to spare. So volunteers hauled the computers to the basement of Payne's 1,400-square-foot Livonia home, the basement that is the headquarters of JDS, the nonprofit group that he founded with two patients and friends, Drake Davis and Scott Montgomery — JDS, Jim, Drake and Scott, get it?

The team repaired and rebuilt and then donated 18 computers to Dixon Elementary in northwest Detroit. But that's not all. Comcast sent so much equipment that Payne and his team built and donated 20 computers to Drew Middle School in Detroit and another 16 to Habitat for Humanity and another 22 to St. Bartholomew, a Catholic school on Detroit's Outer Drive.

But that's not all.

The JDS volunteers are completing work on 24 computers that they plan to donate to St. Pascal Elementary School in Taylor and another 20 to Bethany Lutheran School on Detroit's east side — all reconditioned computers that, while not new, will replace older units of lesser quality.

**What inspires a good Samaritan?**

What would motivate someone to spend thousands of hours doing this, more than at his full-time job as a dentist? How about a mix of humble beginnings, an obsessive-compulsive nature and the ties he has to his dental patients?

Payne's parents moved to Detroit from a little town in the Carolina mountains, where they lived in a house so far back into the woods that "they used to have to bring sunshine in in wheelbarrows," Payne said.

His father worked 16-hour days as a pipe fitter for Solvay Brothers on Jefferson Street and in the shipyards on the river building vessels for the war — all to save for a house. It took 14 years, but in 1953 he moved the family to Wyandotte. Payne grew up and worked for Chrysler, went to Vietnam, then attended the University of Detroit and its dental school on the GI bill.

**Learning to love computers**

Payne's first computer job was in his dental office in Northville, where he taught himself to repair a new one that kept crashing.

"I had just bought it, and it kept crashing." The company that he was too gracious to name sent repairmen out three times to fix it and "it never got fixed so the obsessive-compulsive in me said if I was going to get it fixed, I'd have to fix it myself."

He mentioned his new skills to a patient who brought in a computer to be repaired and donated. And word spread.

Last September, Payne and his crew formed their nonprofit. And last month, a patient who was a mentor at Dixon Elementary told him about the vandals.

Now Payne — a tennis player until he tore his rotator cuff, a biker who logged 50,000 miles in 12 years on his bike until his heart became enlarged — works to light up children's eyes.

"For those people who understand altruism and helping people, every time I'm a little depressed or not feeling too good, I can go downstairs and rebuild a couple of computers, and help 20 people," he said. "Wouldn't that be a nice feeling — every time you're feeling bad, to do that? That would be the kind of job everybody would like to have."

Payne's team has rebuilt 1,150 computers — roughly \$500,000 worth of computers used by 10,000 people. Payne will turn 60 on Christmas Eve, a fitting date for a Santa Claus of sorts. He is evidence of the way things should be in our community.

That's how it's supposed to work.

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