

# Newton Citizen

**By Beth Sexton**  
**Staff Correspondent**

Operation 405 is taking shape and already volunteers have loaded more than 4,300 gift boxes onto a truck that will head to Mexico in a few weeks to make the Christmas holidays happier for boys and girls. It is a project that would have made Matt Allen smile and one that his friends later discovered actually fulfills a promise he made just before he died.

Allen, who was killed July 15, 2000, when the 15-passenger van he was riding in flipped over during an accident on its way back to Georgia from a mission trip to Mexico, had told the pastor in Mexico that he was coming back and bringing gifts to the children in the village.

Later that year, Allen's friends decided to honor his memory by putting together gift boxes for the Mexican children. Ironically, they later learned from the pastor in the village near Chihuahua City, Mexico that Allen had promised holiday gifts before he headed home from that fateful trip.

Volunteers packed and sent 1,000 gift boxes that first year. This year, the number has grown beyond 4,000, and, thanks to efforts from other area churches, the number is expected to swell to between 11,000 and 12,000 before the truck leaves town.

<sup>3</sup>Our church was having a difficult time getting beyond this event,<sup>2</sup> Doug Doster said of how friends and family in the congregation of Julia A. Porter United Methodist Church in Porterdale were taking the death of Allen.

Doster said he and the others talked about how much Allen loved the children in Mexico and that this project would be an honor to his memory and show the love of Jesus Christ.

Doster, who was on the mission trip with Allen and was with him when he died, still has a difficult time talking about the young man who was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor at the age of 15.

<sup>3</sup>The outlook was not good,<sup>2</sup> Doster remembers the doctors telling friends and family after Allen's operation. But the teenager made it through and lived

12 more years, much of which was spent sharing his testimony and helping others.

Doster said Allen at 15 was <sup>3</sup>spindly and weak.<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>But he was a determined young man,<sup>2</sup> he added. <sup>3</sup>He started working out and

405 was a bench-lifting mark he reached. He played softball for the church team and his number was 405. It was a special number to him. We later found out the pastor (in Mexico) said his own life verse was II Corinthians 4:5, or you could say 4:05: <sup>3</sup>For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord ...<sup>2</sup> Concerned about how hard it was for those who loved Allen at Julia A. Porter UMC to get beyond the tragic event, Doster said he had prayed and felt the Lord leading him to begin Operation 405. Church members and other volunteers quickly got involved, including Lisa Nelson, who Doster said has been a <sup>3</sup>big help.<sup>2</sup> In addition, two other churches, Prospect United Methodist and Gaithers United Methodist churches, signed on to Operation 405 and will help reach the 11,000-plus goal of boxes that will be delivered by Doster and other volunteers in early December.

Other churches are also invited to help with Operation 405, and can do so by calling Julia A. Porter UMC at 770-786-6149. Doster said financial help in offsetting the transportation costs would also be appreciated. Donors can send checks to the church at P.O. Box 700, Porterdale, GA 30070.

Operation 405 has become a community project, with a local corporation, Smurfit-Stone, a manufacturing company in Covington, donating the thousands of boxes needed for the gifts. Doster said each box includes a number of necessities, such as a toothbrush and toothpaste, socks, soap and plastic cups, as well as composition notebooks, coloring books, pens, pencils and small toys, to name a few of the items.

Volunteers will distribute the boxes to children in Monterrey, Saltpillio and Chihuahua City, Mexico.

Allen, who was 27 when he died, was survived by his parents, Wayne and Marcia Allen of Covington. He was also a twin. Brother Marc Allen and his expectant wife April are getting ready for the arrival of their first baby any day now. It is a little boy and they have already named him Matt Allen.