

‘You ready to go shopping?’

By KEITH COUSINS/Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, December 12, 2016 12:00 am

POST FALLS — Up until Sunday morning, 10-year-old Lizzy Alexander had never been inside of a police car.

But when Post Falls Police Sgt. Justin Anderson arrived at her Post Falls home, it wasn't to take the fifth-grader to juvenile hall.

It was to take Lizzy to pick out Christmas gifts for her family.

"You ready to go shopping?" Anderson's wife, Lindsey, asked Lizzy.

"I love shopping," Lizzy said excitedly before getting into the front passenger seat of the patrol vehicle.

For more than a decade, local law enforcement and emergency agencies have put on a Holidays and Heroes event, during which local kids in need have the chance to select Christmas presents for their family members. This year's event saw more than 100 kids get to participate, thanks to tens of thousands of dollars raised through donations from individuals and businesses.

"It's a fun way to be involved in the community and see these families get some help during the holidays," Justin Anderson said. "We go into homes all the time where there are obvious needs and it's kind of nice to get them some help."

Before heading out to pick up Lizzy, the Andersons joined other law enforcement and emergency personnel at the Post Falls Police Office for a briefing, where they were handed information about Lizzy and what her family members would like for Christmas. The information also contained another, "Secret Santa," list to be given to volunteers who shopped for presents to give an unaware Lizzy.

The same scene played out at multiple offices Sunday morning. Other local agencies that participated in this year's Holidays and Heroes event included: the Coeur d'Alene Police Department, Coeur d'Alene Tribal Police, Idaho State Police, Kootenai County Fire & Rescue, Kootenai County Sheriff's Office, Rathdrum Police Department, and the Spirit Lake Police Department.

"We're going to go out and try to find some good stuff today," Anderson told Lizzy as he made his way toward Walmart. "We're going to have some fun!"

On the ride over, the Andersons spoke with Lizzy about who she would be shopping for — her younger sister, older brother and mother. They also asked Lizzy about school and her favorite subject, science.

"What's your favorite part about science?" Lindsey asked.

"The experiments," Lizzy replied. "My favorite experiment was making bottle rockets."



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CONTINUED — "That's pretty cool," Anderson said as they arrived at Walmart. "Let's go see if we can find some stuff for your sister."

The Andersons followed Lizzy over to the doll aisle of the store, where the girl began to go through each and every "Monster High" doll available in search of the perfect gift for her 8-year-old sister. After selecting a doll, and a doll-house, the Andersons worked with Lizzy to pick up gifts for her mom and older brother.

Throughout the process Anderson carefully monitored the selected items to ensure Lizzy was within budget and able to get as many gifts as possible for her family members. He also periodically checked in with the Secret Santa volunteers who were picking out the perfect gifts for Lizzy.

"Do you think they're going to like it?" Lizzy looked up and asked the Andersons before the trio headed to the check-out.

"I hope so!" Anderson replied.

On the way to the Greyhound Event Center to complete the day, Anderson showed Lizzy all of the tools his patrol vehicle provides — from the video cameras to the GPS system — and fielded multiple questions from Lizzy as to how everything works. At the event center, teams of volunteers worked quickly to wrap all of the presents up for Lizzy, while the girl was able to select additional donated items such as clothing and blankets.

Lizzy was also sent home with all the fixings for a complete Christmas dinner.

"It's really nice, it's fun that they do something for the community like this, especially around Christmas," Lindsey said. "It's nice that the kids have these positive things so they can see that officers are good guys and not just disciplinarians."