

# Parish's donations come decorated

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The brightly painted animals lined up in the Ark Park outside Deerfield's Holy Cross Catholic Church did not come two by two. They came by the hundreds.

The "animals" -- everything from bees and geese to goats and cows -- represent donations to the Heifer International Project, which sends real critters to help impoverished villages in far-flung corners of the world become self-sustaining.

Schoolchildren at the church have donated to the project for years as part of the lenten season of giving, but this year, leaders decided to expand it to the whole parish.

To make the giving more fun, the church decided to make plywood cutouts that buyers took home to decorate, and starting last week whole families began bringing them to the church lawn for display.

"I knew people would be creative, but I'm blown away," said **Mary Ann Spina**, a pastoral associate who came up with the idea based on Chicago's "Cows on Parade" exhibition several years ago. "There are things out there that are so funny, creative and cute."

A teacher at the school designed the shapes, a retired engineer used computers to draft them and a cabinet-maker cut them from plywood donated by a supplier, she said. The display will remain until Wednesday.

Donated animals range in price from \$20 to \$1,000, Spina said, giving everyone a chance to participate.

The church sold nearly all of the 550 animals it had, raising \$55,000, she said.

"We have four little cows left that aren't getting on the ark," she said. "Every other animal is getting on."

The other goal was parish unity, which turned into the spirit of competition for some.

"It got to the point where people wouldn't tell you what they were doing," Spina said. "They didn't want you to steal their ideas."

Parishioner Pat Derrig of Bannockburn, who arrived with daughters Maeve, 11, and Lindsey, 13, to place their livestock among the flock, marveled at the number of animals and the time that went into decorating them.

"It's a cute idea," Derrig said. "It's a fun way to feed the poor."