

Athletes part of larger effort delivering 900 fruit baskets in county

By Anne Boukhalfa-Leon For the Camera Boulder Daily Camera

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Youthful energy and the joy of holiday giving put a spark into Saturday for elderly residents of a Boulder low-income housing complex.

After a morning of weight lifting, the University of Colorado Women's Basketball Team volunteered to deliver fruit baskets to isolated local seniors. The athletes partnered with four other nonprofit organizations to distribute the healthy gifts and spread some seasonal joy.

The team focused on Canyon Pointe, an independent living residence for low-income seniors. The baskets were made and donated by Volunteers of America in Denver. Three of the assistant coaches picked them up and brought them to Boulder while the players were at their morning practice.

"They just seemed so excited to be here and be involved. The residents definitely picked up on that energy," said Emily Ditty, Executive Director of Boulder County Care Connect, the organization that sponsored the program.

This is the first time the women's basketball team has participated in the 25-year-old program. The players had been looking forward to this service opportunity since the coaches brought up the possibility. A few years ago, the CU men's basketball team volunteered for the same program.

"They're already outstanding academics, outstanding athletes and then they choose to volunteer with things like this," said Ditty.

The players joked this was their social time, and conversed with the residents about their college sport.

"Their faces were just so lit up because of these baskets," said sophomore team member Jen Reese.

Boulder County has a large elderly population and a high need for senior services. Serious issues include isolation, depression and trouble getting enough to eat, according to Boulder County Area Agency on Aging.

Boulder Housing Partners and Community Food Share also partnered with the program to distribute a total of fruit baskets to over 900 seniors on Saturday. About 200 volunteers participated, throughout Boulder County.

"It makes me feel part of the community," said Reinhard Tarp, one Canyon Pointe resident.

Tarp has lived in this residence for three years, and before that had resided in similar apartment complex. He said without these kind of rentals, he could be living on the streets.

Ditty said most seniors in need saved money and did everything right -- however, they're just outliving their funds. Aid programs help lighten their financial and emotional stress.

The Care Connect organization on a daily basis is able to deliver groceries, help seniors get to medical appointments and make handyman repairs. This is accomplished in part by hundreds of volunteers like the CU women's basketball team.

"It says a lot about CU, their athletics and these women," said Ditty.

Even the injured players helped deliver the baskets on Saturday. Some of the young women made a connection between these seniors and their grandparents. They were happy to help.

"It just opened everyone's eyes, how small things make a big difference," said Reese.