



Lt. Kevin Grove, Frostburg Police Department, Tina Gormley, Andrea Gormley and Bill Munck of the Frostburg Lions Club survey several hundred "Hugs."

## 'Hugs' program bittersweet for Frostburg Lions members

FOR THE CUMBERLAND TIMES-NEWS

FROSTBURG — The Frostburg Lions Club started its Hugs Program a year ago, as a way to help the Frostburg Police Department with stuffed animals for their child diversion initiative, during emergency, and other situations. The program has blossomed and grown under the leadership of Lion Tina Gormley.

"This is one of those bittersweet programs," said Lion Tina. "The stuffed animals typically go to children in distress." Police, and other agencies, get involved in a lot of domestic issues.

"We use the animals when we're called out for domestic problems," said Lt. Kevin Groves. "Also when parents have to bring their children to the police station, we try to take the edge off." The stuffed animals help with this, and also help to provide a positive image of police officers.

The program began, according to Lt. Groves, with seat belt law enforcement some 10 years ago, as a way to instill in children the importance of using seat belts. The results were positive, and the idea caught on for child diversion, in a variety of law enforcement activities. Thus far Frostburg Lions have distributed over 100 stuffed critters, to the Frostburg Police.

Gormley and Groves agreed that "it is sad that we even have to have a program such as this, that our kids are getting involved in adult problems."

"We do go through a lot of stuff animals," said Groves. "We're glad we have access to this kind of support."

Gormley and other Lions have collected more than 800 stuffed animals for free distribution to police depart-

ments, and other program where children are involved. The Frostburg Lions Hugs Program has partnered with the Catholic Daughters of America, and the seven catholic parishes of western Maryland, seeking animal donations.

"We have donated as far away as Morgantown, W.Va.," said Gormley. "We provided the Ronald McDonald House with some 300 animals for their programs." Frostburg Lions have made contact with a number of other programs in western Maryland, and have begun a large distribution program.

The growth and success of the program has been a surprise for the Frostburg Lions, and they are now looking into providing animals for disaster situations, that may occur throughout the region.

"We can partner with other Lions Clubs, churches and other community resources," said Gormley, "to get the animals in the hand of kids that need them. Comfort can be just "a hug away."

Any agency dealing children in Western Maryland and neighboring West Virginia counties can contact the Frostburg Lions to receive animals from the Hugs Program. The animals are collected and thoroughly inspected before they are distributed. Many are packaged so they can be carried in police cars and remain clean.

If you would like to make a donation to Frostburg Lions Hugs Program, contact Gormley at (301) 689-6970. Cash donations can be sent to the Frostburg Lions Club, Hugs Program, P.O. Box 371, Frostburg, MD 21532. Contributions may be tax deductible, and those making donations should consult their tax preparer.