

TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

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Christmas comes early for Havasuvian

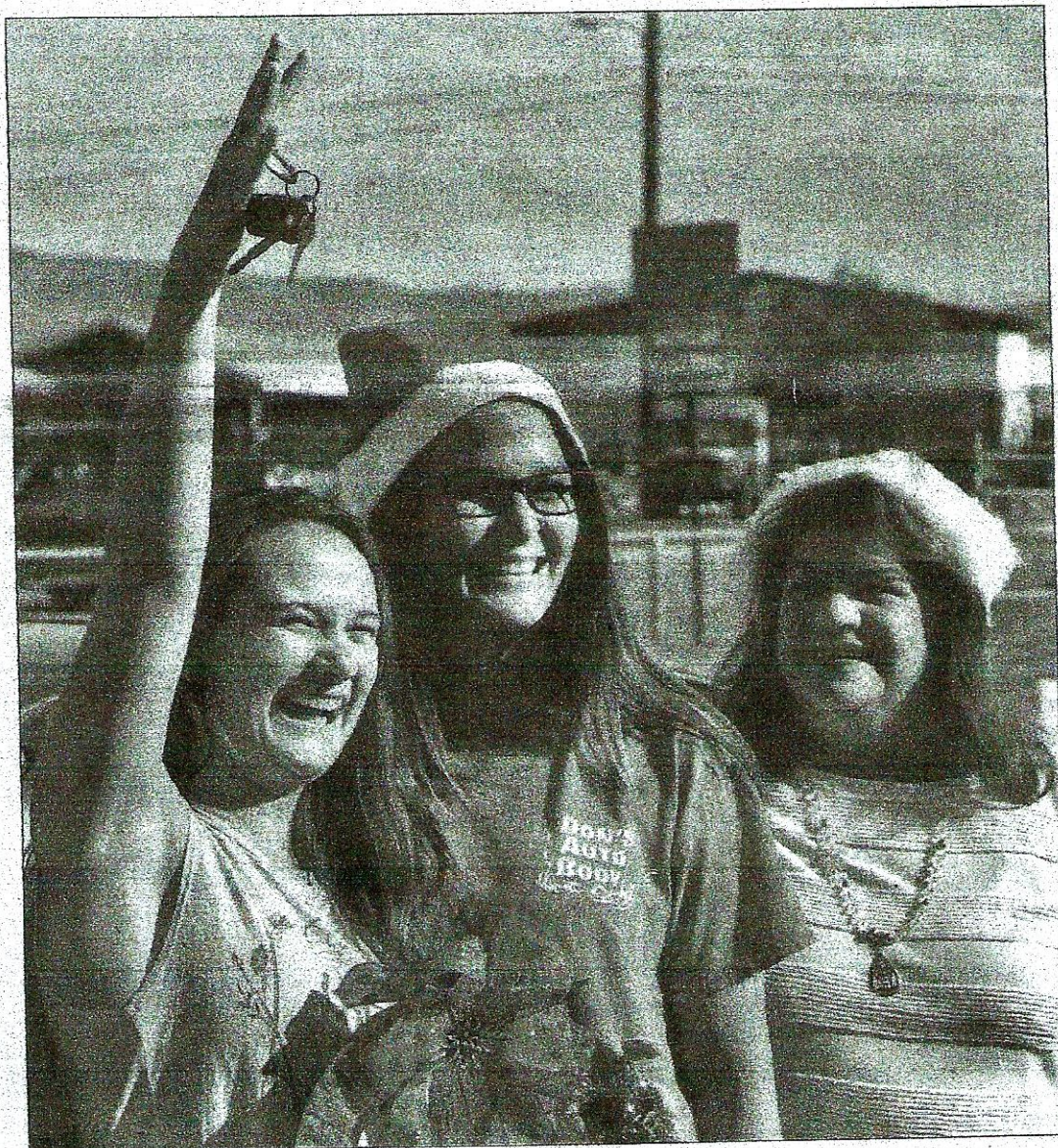
*Soroptimist Club
donates car, gifts
to their 'adoptee'*

By **BRANDON MESSICK**
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Lake Havasu City's Soroptimist Club takes its name from the Latin words, "Soros," which means "sister"; and "Optimus," which means "best." They don't like to brag, but to one Havasu woman, the Soroptimists proved themselves to be great sisters.

Mary Demico arrived at Conquest Boats, at 648 N. Lake Havasu Ave., expecting little more than a visit with friends. The "sisters" greeted Demico, some of them wearing "Santa" caps – and many more wearing the familiar smile of someone with a pleasant surprise in store. The Soroptimists have worked with 20-year-old Demico since July, and in that time, Demico has come to see them as a family greater than any she'd ever had. On Wednesday, the Soroptimists met her with gifts in hand – including the keys to 2006 Toyota Avalon.

The Soroptimist Club this July "adopted" Demico, a former ward of Arizona's foster care system. Demico was taken from her parents in Tucson when she was 12 years old, and remembers sleeping in cheap hotel rooms, surrounded by an



Brandon Messick / Today's News-Herald

Mary Demico (left), a former Arizona foster child, raises the keys to her new 2006 Toyota Avalon, given to her Wednesday by the Lake Havasu City Soroptimist Club. The club took it upon themselves to mentor Demico earlier this year. Also pictured is Soroptimist Club members Theresa Zadra (middle) and Candy Adragna.

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atmosphere of poverty and drug addiction until the day she was seized from her parents' custody by Arizona's Child Protective Services.

Demico spent six years as one of almost 18,000 foster children in Arizona. She rebelled, she says, and sometimes attempted to run away. Two years ago, Demico "aged out" of the foster care system and moved to Havasu to escape what she called "bad habits, and bad people."

"I was in a rough situation," she said. "But from where I was then, and where I am now, I'm a completely different person."

According to Soroptimist committee member Candy Adragna, the club learned of Demico from the Arizona's Children Association, and chose to "adopt" her. The club's members have

each offered guidance, support and encouragement to Demico. Since then, Demico has gained her GED, and enrolled at Mohave Community College for its 2017 spring semester.

"(The Soroptimists) are my family," Demico said. "It's like having a bunch of aunts, sisters, moms...it's amazing. I feel loved. I feel like I belong somewhere."

According to Soroptimist committee member Candy Adragna, the Soroptimists have already donated a laptop computer and a printer to help with Demico's coursework. Demico is only the first young woman the club has helped this way, Adragna says, but she won't be the last. The club intends to "adopt" other former foster children in the future.

"I have no doubt she would have succeeded on her own," Adragna said. "But she's part of our family now. She could have

done it on her own, but she needed someone there to be joyful for her, to pat her on the back and be proud of her. She's vivacious, intelligent, hardworking and dependable. Mary has already said she wants to help mentor the next girl we adopt."

Demico intends to help in mentoring the next young woman "adopted" by the Soroptimist Club as she pursues an associate degree in administration of justice at Mohave Community College, starting January 2017. Demico intends to pursue a full degree in criminal justice after her graduation.

Demico's new car was donated by the family of Soroptimist member Mary Ellen Sanders, who died earlier this month. Repairs to the car were donated by Don't Auto-Body of Havasu.