



Photo by Terry Oparka

Gina Jackson is overcome with emotion as she poses in front of the 2002 Kia she received through the Benevolence Car Program sponsored by Collex Collision and the Traffic Safety Association of Macomb County Dec. 14.

Two single moms get the gift of transportation

BY HEIDI ROMAN AND TERRY OPARKA
C & G STAFF WRITERS

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Nobody said a single mother's job is easy, but for two women, raising children and trying to make ends meet is even tougher without the use of a car.

But this Christmas, Gina Jackson of Sterling Heights and Lindsey Damschroeder of Washington Township got a welcome surprise that's sure to help.

Collex Collision Experts partnered with the Traffic Association of Macomb County to help identify Macomb County residents in need of reliable transportation. On Dec. 14, Schroeder and Jackson each received a 2002 Kia Rio, restored to new condition by Collex, and many other gifts to brighten their season. Both women wept as Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel presented them with the keys to their four-door vehicles, which were equipped with child safety seats.

"I just immediately started crying," said Jackson, mother of a four-month-old son, Manuel. "I kept thanking them. Words can't explain how thankful I am."

The 20-year-old Sterling Heights resident used to work as a nurse's aide, but has had to stop working, as she raises her son by herself. Manuel was born with a hole in his heart that caused a variety of health problems, and now Jackson takes him to doctors and specialists two or three times a week. But that was tricky without a car.

"It was complicated, but I would do anything for my son," she said. "My son is my world, my life." Now Jackson is looking forward to not having to take the bus or beg

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friends for rides. Compassion Pregnancy referred her to Collex, and she wrote an essay to try and win the donation.

Damschroeder, the other recipient of a Kia, is raising her nine-month-old son, Jeffrey, on her own while trying to pursue a degree in nursing. Without a car, she's had to walk to her job and struggles to make it to classes at Baker College.

"She's a wonderful young girl who has a young boy, trying to raise him without a father," said Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel. "She has the potential for success in life, if she just had transportation. If she could overcome that, it might help quite a bit." Hackel is part of the Traffic Safety Association of Macomb County, a nonprofit organization dealing with various traffic issues and concerns.

"It's a great program, and I'm very thankful for it," he said.

The association and Collex tried to find needy families, specifically

single mothers, who are trying to better their lives by going to work or school, said Julie Gagliano, a spokesperson for Collex. Collex repaired the Rios to like-new condition and chose two lucky recipients out of about 50 applications that were received.

In addition to the Rios, Jackson and Damschroeder also got car insurance, gift cards for gasoline and department stores, car wash coupons and toys for their sons. The extra gifts were a surprise, as was the type of vehicle they received.

"I'm just so blessed," Jackson said before discovering what type of car she was getting. "I don't even care what kind it is. Any car to get me back and forth."

Also contributing to the donation were Henderson Glass, Harry & Sons, Jeffrey Buick, LaSalle Bank, Lucido Insurance Agency, Mitch's Auto Parts, Main Street Wheel and Tire, Motor City Auction, NAPA, National City Bank, State Farm Insurance, Saturn of Troy, Macomb Safe Kids, Keystone Automotive, Speed Clean Services and United Lawnscapes.