

Two Abbotsford photographers are donating their skills and time to take Christmas portraits for families who can't afford them **A23**



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## Portraits of kindness

Photographers volunteer their skills at Christmas

Vikki HOPES  
Abbotsford News

The last few months have been tough on Benjamin Flores and his family.

His wife and stepdaughter arrived in Abbotsford from Honduras six months ago, and he was laid off shortly after from his glass-manufacturing job – a victim of the tough economy.

There hasn't been a lot of money for extras.

That's why he was thrilled to get a special gift over the weekend. Ben, his wife Karen and stepdaughter Vanessa had their family portrait taken by two local photographers who provided their skills at no cost.

Lori Holden and Jessica Mezzadri set up their cameras and equipment at Cedar Brook Church and took pictures of families who otherwise can't afford a professional family photograph.

Each family will receive four prints, as well as a CD of the pictures taken.

It's part of a program called Help-Portrait, which began in the U.S. and involves photographers around the world volunteering their time on or around Dec. 12.

Mezzadri, who has been a professional photographer for four years, first heard about the program through an email.

"This really interested me because it was about giving to others," she said.

She forwarded it to Holden, a friend whom she met because their daughters went to the same preschool and dance studio.

Holden has been a professional photographer for about three years. She too, was immediately drawn to the idea.

"I am passionate about giving, especially if I can do that through photography."

The pair then contacted the Abbotsford Community Services' Christmas Bureau to see if any families could be referred to them.

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## Picture perfect Christmas

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Five were identified, and three showed up at the photo shoot, including the Flores family.

Ben was touched when he realized there were no ulterior motives involved.

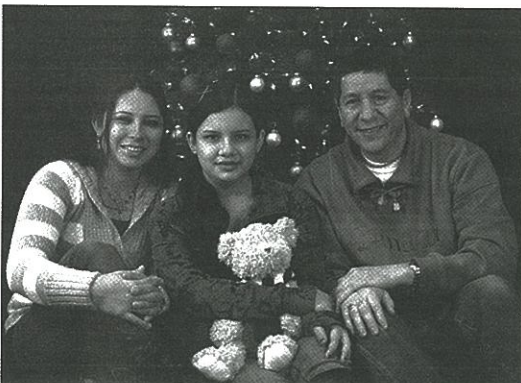
"It is a beautiful gift," he said.

Mezzadri and Holden enjoyed the experience so much that they decided to do it again today (Saturday).

They have made arrangements to spend the day at Grace Church and have as many as 22 families lined up.

They are already making plans for next year, when they want to include Santa, gifts for the kids, and makeovers for the moms.

For more information or to refer a family to Saturday's photo shoot, call Jessica at 604-854-5877.



Above: Photographers Jessica Mezzadri (left) and Lori Holden are involved in a program that provides free portraits for families who otherwise can't afford them. Left: The photo Holden took of Ben Flores, his wife Karen and stepdaughter Vanessa, who were thrilled to have this family portrait taken of them free of charge.



JOHN VAN PUTTEN Abbotsford News

Photographers Jessica Mezzadri (left) and Lori Holden.

LORI HOLDEN Contributed photo