

# Gift from "Green Christmas" project brings holiday cheer

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GILL - Drive five miles north of Kersey, on a dusty country road and you find smiles on the faces of a struggling young couple who are dealing with family issues far greater than most.

Newlyweds Austin and Justine Wahlert struggle just like every young couple, trying to figure a way to make ends meet from month to month. Blessed with a newly born daughter, Regan, the young couple learned recently that their daughter has been diagnosed with a heart defect and Down's Syndrome.

"Regan is our everything," said Austin. "I feel that my life just started when we found out that Justine was going to have a baby."

Austin, a former Eaton High graduate (2007) is a struggling musician. His wife is a Platte Valley graduate of the same year. As he begins his new found career as a singer/songwriter, he realizes that it is going to take lots of hard work. The well-known northern Colorado band that can be found online at "AustinWahlert.com" donates time to support several local charitable cancer benefits. "We did this long before we ever knew that Regan would bless our lives," he said. The band has just released its first CD. It is available online.

He has played numerous venues including the Greeley Stampede. The band hopes to get an opportunity to perform at Cheyenne Frontier Days in the near future.

Wahlert's long range goal is to make his given talent, a life-time career.

"Justine and Regan are both my inspiration and I will do everything possible within my talents to get over this hump in our life. The two mean the world to me."

With the shocking news, the former Odessa College scholarship rodeo bull rider and his wife now face even a tougher situation than Austin's two broken back injuries. Their daughter will have corrective heart surgery just a few weeks into the new year.

Kathie Robson, a volunteer for "Gift of a



Justine and Austin Wahlert and their daughter Regan are pictured with Kathie and Duane Robson. The Robsons delivered a fresh-cut green Christmas tree to the Wahlerts Saturday as part of the "Green Christmas" project. Regan has been diagnosed with a heart defect and Down's Syndrome. She will undergo heart surgery in early 2013.

Herald-Voice photo by Jim Merriott

Green Christmas," and her husband Duane took time out of their busy schedule Saturday to help supply and set up a beautiful six-foot fresh-cut green Christmas tree for the Wahlert family.

Mrs. Robson said the project now works with the Colorado State Forestry. The non-profit 501c organization works to supply approximately 300 tree for families in need.

"I am just the messenger," said Mrs. Robson. She explained, "Former Eaton resident Ryan Behm started this project about a dozen years ago when he was just 21 years old, seeing a family in need, it touched his heart. It became aware to him that some neighbors were unable enjoy the holiday spirit. He cut a fresh Christmas tree and supplied it with ornaments, paying for the project out of his own pocket. Each year after, the project grew. With help, Behm was able to turn the project into a non-profit organization. The organiza-

tion has grown each year. Thanks to the help of the Colorado State Forestry, couples in need can enjoy the holiday with a new cut tree. It is just a way of sharing the joyful holiday spirit with our Weld County neighbors."

Wahlert travels to Nashville to work with people in the country music industry each month. He wanted to thank everyone who has helped him along the way.

"This means so much to us," said Wahlert as he tried to speak with a lump in his throat.

"I just want to say thanks to friends, families and everyone who has been so kind to us, especially to Jack and Illa Mae Larson. The Larsons helped us get into our home. We want to thank all the people who were so generous with the Gift of a Green Christmas. This is a humbling experience and it will not be forgotten."