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TERRETON, ID, December 31, 2015 – December 29 was a banner day for Jefferson County Employee Barbara Carpenter, and there are at least two families who are very grateful they crossed her path.

In a matter of hours, Carpenter helped a Madison County family locate a very important cell phone lost in the landfill and helped reunite a father with his children for the last of the holidays.

For Carpenter, it was all in a day's work.

Carpenter, of Montevue, is a 20-year veteran of the Circular Butte Landfill. While working her duties as an office assistant, she received a call from a frantic Madison County resident who explained that a cell phone had been inadvertently placed in the trash, was loaded into a truck, and ended up at the landfill at Circular Butte.

"[The cell phone] contained a number of important business and personal contacts," recalled Solid Waste Supervisor Ted Goodier. "[Barbara] contacted the Operator and requested he delay crushing the load as long as possible to allow the caller time to arrive and attempt to locate the phone. As a result the individual was able to retrieve the phone from a load of approximately 90 cubic yards of municipal waste."

As the search for the cell phone commenced, Carpenter diverted incoming garbage trucks to other areas of the landfill. Luckily, the search only lasted a few minutes. The cell phone was charged and it didn't take long for the family to locate the ringing. And, they only had to move a few bags before their phone was found.

"It was nothing short of a miracle," Carpenter said. "I never got their names; I don't know who they were. But I'm glad I could help." Carpenter was offered a cash reward, which she refused.

But this wasn't the end of Carpenter's remarkable day. In the midst of the cell phone search, she learned that the Operator, Daniel Tafoya, had been unable to see his children in the last four months. The car seats for Tafoya's children had been damaged in a car accident, and he was unable to immediately replace them. Without the car seats, he couldn't bring his young children home for a visit.

"That just wasn't right, so I had to do something," Carpenter explained. "I made several calls and finally located an organization that could provide Daniel with car seats. The sheriff's office verified his situation, and we were able to get the seats for him."

The next day, Tafoya brought his children in to meet their benefactor.

"They didn't even know me, but they all hugged me and were so happy to see their dad. I just cried," Carpenter said. "And, Daniel knows that he has support all around him. He's not alone."

"It's nice to recognize an employee for good stuff we do all the time," Goodier said.

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