

Redlands Groups Holding Toy Drives

By JESSE B. GILL, Staff Writer
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REDLANDS - Thanksgiving is history and Redlands non-profits are looking forward to Christmas and the toy drives that come with it.

The city has a handful of groups that collect toys for kids during Christmas time, and hundreds of community members who help make the drives happen every year.

"I think that's one of the things that makes Redlands Redlands," said P.T. McEwen, CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands. "You have plenty of people ready to help out and give."

Family Services Association will again hold its annual toy drive.

"Family Services has toy boxes all around at merchants in downtown Redlands and in other stores throughout town," said board member Rose Palmer.

The effort helps the community twice, because people can shop in Redlands stores and then drop toys off that will go to Redlands kids, Palmer said.

The toys will be distributed through Family Services' holiday shop, where parents can pick out toys for their kids, she said.

For a complete list of the stores participating in Family Service Association's toy drive, call (909) 793-2673.

The Redlands Fire Department will hold its yearly "Spark of Love" toy drive, which will piggy-back on Family Services' efforts. The Boys & Girls Clubs will also collect and distribute toys for the Spark of Love toy drive.

"So people (in need) can go to one of those two organizations, go through their application process and those organizations contact (the Fire Department) and we will disperse the toys through them," said Engineer Eva Toppo.

In the Spark of Love drive's first years, the firefighters distributed toys personally - by driving through neighborhoods in fire trucks and dropping off the toys at applicants' doorsteps. Because the need for Christmas toys has exploded over the last two years, the firefighters can no longer make the house calls they used to.

"When I first started delivering toys, it was like 12 families," Toppo said. "But our toy drive grew last year, when we had over 2,500 kids.

"And this year, I expect it to be even bigger."

People wishing to donate to the Spark of Love toy drive can drop toys off at Family Service Association, 612 Lawton St. - and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands at 1251 Clay St.

Donors can also drop off toys at the city's four fire stations:

Fire Station 261
525 E. Citrus Avenue

Fire Station 262
1690 Garden

Fire Station 263
10 W. Pennsylvania

Fire Station 264
1270 W. Park Avenue

The Fire Department is also accepting toys at its administration office at City Hall, 35 Cajon St.

McEwen said the need for toys could be larger this year than in the past based on employment information from some parents who sign their kids up at the Boys & Girls Clubs.

"We have seen an increase in parents listing their occupation as 'self-employed,' " he said. "I think that could be their way of saying they are unemployed."

McEwen said Christmas can be tough on children when they go to school the Monday after and their friends start talking about the presents they unwrapped.

"And then there are some kids that don't have a lot to talk about," he said.

And not having toys or gifts to compare with their friends can lead to children feeling bad about themselves, he said.

Not having presents under the tree for the kids can also weigh heavily on the minds of parents, McEwen said.

"It can be hard on the parents because they want to provide for their kids," he said.

Stor-n-Lock in Redlands is also a collection point for Toys for Tots through Dec. 15.

Donors can drop off new, unwrapped toys from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Stor-n-Lock is at 1006 N. Wabash Ave.

The Daily Facts will continue to print lists of organizations holding toy drives and how the community can get involved.

Non-profit organizations and other groups holding Redlands Christmas toy drives can contact Staff Writer Jesse B. Gill for news coverage.

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