

Toys aim to cheer tots

Written by Susan Hunter
Valley Gazette

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2008

The economy may be down, but spirits were up at the kick-off breakfast for this year's Valley Toys for Tots campaign.

Those at Team Inc. who organize the annual event are making sure that Santa arrives once again for Valley children in need, despite the dismal economic climate.

The number of families who apply to receive toys at the Toys for Tots toy store probably will increase this year, and toy donations for the store may decrease, said Diane Stroman, director of development at Team Inc.

"It may be a challenging year," Stroman said to supporters and volunteers who gathered at John J. Sullivan's Restaurant in Ansonia last Thursday to herald another season of giving in the Valley.

Changes probably will be made to adjust to the economic situation, Stroman said. For example, parents who used to be able to select five toys for each child probably will be allotted four toys this year.

But the event that provided toys to more than 1,200 children in the Valley region in 2007 promises once more to make a big difference for Valley children this holiday season.

To apply for toy shopping

Families who are eligible for Team Inc. services and want to shop at the store may apply now through Monday, Dec. 15 from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. weekdays at Team Inc., 30 Elizabeth St., Derby.

They must provide proof of residence and income, and children's birth certificates. Families who are accepted are given a time and date to shop at the Valley Toys for Tots store on the fifth floor of the ATP Building, 497 East Main St., Ansonia.

The toy store will be open four days this year, rather than three, to accommodate a larger number of families, Stroman said, and avoid a crowded shopping situation. The store will be open until 7 p.m. two of the days to accommodate working families. It will be open Wednesday, Dec. 17, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Thursday, Dec. 18 and Fri. Dec. 19, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Monday, Dec. 22, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Parents and other shoppers will receive Santa dollars to shop for toys that are color coded according to price range. Red is for high-range toys, green for mid-range items, and yellow for toys that are less expensive.

Volunteers needed

"We need a full staff of volunteers," Stroman said, including a volunteer coordinator. Teenagers who are mature enough to do the work may lend their services.

Volunteers are needed to process applications at TEAM Inc. offices through Dec. 15, pick up toys from various drop-off sites from Dec. 5 to Dec. 22, and help set up and prepare the toy store from Nov. 17 through Dec. 22. Students from Emmett O'Brien Technical High School, under the supervision of staff member Chris Sansone, will help build and set up shelves.

Others can volunteer to stock tables and count and sort toys by age, gender and value. Help is needed at the toy store on shopping days from Dec. 17 to Dec. 22 to check in and greet those who arrive to shop,

restock, and serve as room assistants, checkout assistants and sorters.

Volunteers also are needed for inventory and cleanup from Jan. 5 to Jan. 9. Call Trish Wigglesworth at 736-5420, Ext. 1221, or e-mail her at twigglesworth@teaminc.org.

To donate toys

New, unwrapped toys may be donated through Dec. 15. Toys may be dropped off at the Valley Toys for Tots store, 497 East Main St., Ansonia, fifth floor, or at Team Inc., 30 Elizabeth St., Derby.

In Oxford, drop-off points are at Coldwell Banker R.E., 72 Oxford Rd; Naugatuck Savings Bank, 71 Oxford Rd; Oxford Town Hall, 486 Oxford Rd; Smile Dental Center, 318 Oxford Rd; and Webster Bank, 60 Oxford Rd.

To schedule a toy pickup, call Wigglesworth.

Donated toys should be "safe" toys, Stroman said, and no toy guns or swords or toys that "project out" will be accepted. Suggested gifts range from hand-held electronic games, watches and skateboards to curling irons, soccer balls and craft kits. Gifts cards to local malls, stores and cinemas also are suggested.

Monetary donations are welcome, and checks to benefit the toy campaign should be made out to Team Inc., Toys for Tots.

Those lending a hand

The city of Ansonia has provided the space for the toy store in the ATP building for the past few years.

"We're happy to play a small role in an important project," said Ansonia Mayor Jim Della Volpe, who spoke briefly at the breakfast on Thursday.

Others who have helped with the campaign include Staffworks Inc., the Seymour company that collects toys each year at the Seymour Christmas Parade; John Markette and Charlie Sullivan, owners of John J. Sullivan's restaurant, which has sponsored the breakfast for the past two years; and the Seymour Police Department and Seymour Stop & Shop, which conduct toy drives to benefit Toys for Tots.

Those who attend the annual Christmas party and outdoor breakfast hosted by Tom and Diane Baklik are asked to bring a new, unwrapped toy for the Toys for Tots campaign.

The breakfast takes place Sunday, Nov. 30 at 9 a.m. at 19 Chucta Road, Seymour.

Once more this year, Hassler Inc. of Milford will donate bicycles to families whose names are drawn to win a free bike.