



Perris News

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JPA Delivers Christmas for Underprivileged Kids

Contributions from Perris City workers and others helped make Christmas possible for 150 underprivileged children this year.

Those donations helped purchase shoes, clothing and toys for homeless children whose parents live in dormitories and kitchenettes on the former March Air Force Base. City officials and representatives of the cargo carrier March Joint Powers Authority delivered the gifts this week to the Lutheran Social Services and Path of Life Ministries.

Both work with homeless families.

Lori Stone, executive director of the March Joint Powers Authority, said none of the gifts would have been possible without the assistance of kind-hearted donors. Perris has been a major supporter of the base and the JPA for years and Christmas 2008 was no different.

"We rely on contributions to make it happen," Stone said. "It's been difficult to raise money this year. But when you see children and families with nothing, it makes you take a step back. Things may be tough but some people don't have anything."

Stone said the JPA has been providing Christmas to the underprivileged at March for five years. When Congress downsized March in the mid 1990s, part of the realignment included using portions of the former base for homeless services. Other donations came from utilities, the County of Riverside and business owners. The Christmas gift giving was not the first this year. The JPA helped feed 250 parents and children at Thanksgiving.

Ellen Stephens, a JPA employee who helped buy the gifts, said the number of children needing help this year doubled from 2007.

"We're pretty amazed at the number of kids who don't have homes," she said.

JPA workers loaded a van full of goodies for the short haul to the shelters. Tuesday, they visited Path of Life Ministries. There, families are struggling to overcome the loss of a job, bad credit or drug and alcohol addictions. They stay at the shelter for months, learning parenting and money management classes while they and their families get a place to stay.

Residents like Stephanie and Herlina call the program a godsend and thanked the JPA visitors for making Christmas possible.

"I feel so blessed," Stephanie said as her children prepared to open gifts. "I'm really happy here. I love this place. It helps us out a lot."

Herlina said Path of Life helped her beat drug addiction and gain custody of her daughter. She's been sober 18 months.

"I feel great relief to be here," she said.

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, who takes over as chairman of the JPA in 2009, said Perris has always supported the work of the JPA. Never more so than when that work helps heal broken families.

"This is a difficult time but we're glad to help out in any way we can," Yarbrough said.



A family at Path of Life Ministries gets ready to open packages delivered by volunteers from the March Joint Powers Authority. Perris is a member of the agency.



JPA executive director Lori Stone makes a new friend.



A stockpile of presents leaves this youngster wide-eyed and excited.

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