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News - The Sun News

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 Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009

Businesses get into holiday giving spirit

By ANGELA WOOLEN - awoolen@macon.com

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WARNER ROBINS — Many local businesses are helping others this holiday season.

Robins Federal Credit Union already donates to charity, but this year, the marketing department decided the credit union needed to do more to give back to the community.

The credit union decided to give \$500 checks to 10 local organizations, including the Salvation Army and Hodac.

"Everyone was very grateful," said marketing manager Traci Jolley.

Jolley said the credit union always tries to give back to the community, but with the recession, it wanted to do more. The money was funded through a budget that is approved each year.

"Giving is down, but the need is greater," Jolley said.

Decreased giving was not the case in the contracting department at Robins Air Force Base. The department, which annually dresses up teddy bears and fills stockings for children, has doubled the number of teddy bears and stockings since 2000.

This year, about 250 bears were dressed up and 200 stockings were filled by the employees of the department, as well as others on base.

Heather Perkins, a management assistant in the department, headed up the project for the first time.

"This is our 22nd year doing it," Perkins said.

Evelyn Thornhill, captain at The Salvation Army, said the charity purchases the bears and stockings for the department.

Thornhill has been with the Salvation Army for 11 years, but her involvement with the organization goes back to when she was 9.

"I was a recipient of a Christmas" from The Salvation Army, she said.

Someone from her church knew of her family's situation and came to her mother's house bearing gifts.

"I know how it feels to have no tree, no gifts and have someone come to my house," said Thornhill. "You don't forget that kind of charity or love."

The giving doesn't stop there. Several businesses have drop boxes for charities like Kids Yule Love or Toys for Tots.

Crickets Bar and Grill on Russell Parkway has been a sponsor of Toys for Tots for six years.

"Usually we do it all year long," owner Cricket Rathbun said.

Rathbun said each year the bar and grill sponsors a motorcycle ride with the American Patriots. This year, they have raised about \$2,000 for the charity.

Even though it's a bar and the economy is down, Rathbun said patrons "flood the stuff in here."

She said people can give up until Christmas Eve. She currently has more than 100 toys in several Toys for Tots boxes.

"The Marines pick up the toys that are given late and distribute them to the poverty areas," Rathbun said. "They make sure every kid gets something."

In addition, several businesses help feed the needy through Perry Volunteer Outreach. The group hands out 500 boxes of food each year to needy people in Perry. Businesses, schools and churches supply the food that goes into the boxes.

The Westfield School donated 500 cans of cranberry sauce and Perdue Farms donated 500 chickens. Sunday school classes donated as well.

The months of November and December are "absolutely nuts" in regard to the amount of work required to put the boxes together, make sure children have Christmas presents and host a dinner for 750 people at the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter, said Larry Wood of Perry Volunteer Outreach.

The fairgrounds hosts the dinner, and its in-house catering company, Concession by Cox, provides the food.

"That's no small donation," Wood said.

Wood has been in Perry for 27 years and said he is impressed with the level of giving that the community has.

"There is no big burden on just one person," he said.

To contact writer Angela Woolen, call 923-5650.

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