

THE SANTA SHOP

You know that warm feeling. The feeling on Christmas morning, watching someone's face light up as they unwrap the gift you so lovingly spent much time deliberating on, finally deciding it would be the perfect gift for them.

Fort Collins' "The Santa Shop," held in mid-December by the Crossroads Safehouse, gives others a chance to feel the same way.

The Santa Shop was created as a way to distribute the holiday gift donations received from the community to the women and children served by Crossroads and to give them the chance to enjoy giving a Christmas present, an opportunity they might not otherwise have had.

Crossroads Safehouse offers a safe environment for victims of domestic violence and promotes social change for the community through education and intervention. It currently operates a 12-bedroom safehouse in Larimer County for battered women and their children to receive shelter for up to six weeks.

The Santa Shop is set up every year at an undisclosed location by local organizations and churches. Several weeks are spent decorating the space and filling it up with donated items. Separate rooms are set up for shopping – one for mothers and one for children. Shoppers then select from the donated items the gifts they want to give other members of their family.

The area set up for women is filled with new toys, clothes, CDs, and many other presents they can choose for their children, while the children visit a room filled with items such as soaps, clothes and jewelry they can choose for their mothers. Staff and volunteers help children choose and wrap gifts for their moms. Santa and Mrs. Claus also stop by occasionally, spending some time with the kids and getting their pictures taken.

The needs for this event vary greatly. Donations can include gifts for mothers or children (age 6 months to the mid-teens), wrapping paper, holiday decorations or winter treats such as hot chocolate, coffee, cream, sugar, cookies and candy canes.

To view additional year-round needs, please view the organization's wish list at www.crossroadssafehouse.org/wishlist.html

Monetary donations are also always welcome and can be made online or mailed to: Crossroads Safehouse, P.O. Box 993, Fort Collins, CO 80522. For more information, call 482-3535. ❖

ARTICLES BY LAUREN SHAFFER ❖ JOURNEY CONTRIBUTOR

our community ❖

FOOD BANK OF LARIMER COUNTY

In preparation for Thanksgiving and holiday food distribution, the Food Bank is asking for food donations that will be distributed to approximately 1,000 families in need. Items needed include turkeys, canned vegetables, stuffing mix, canned cranberry sauce, canned pumpkin pie filling, condensed or evaporated milk, olives, canned yams and canned fruit. Thanksgiving distribution will begin Nov. 18, with turkeys and a basket of accompanying food items being given out to those in need. Donations are accepted at any time at the Food Bank's office at 1301 Blue Spruce. For additional information please call 493-4477. ❖



WomenGive is a new, dynamic network of local women who are using philanthropy to positively impact issues facing women in our community.

Through WomenGive, women have the power to leverage financial resources to make a noticeable difference for future generations by supporting programs, legislation and initiatives that further women's self-sufficiency.

Be a part of the change.

Be a part of the solution.

Be a part of WomenGive.



REQUEST OR SUBMIT A RESOURCE AT WWW.JOURNEYONLINE.INFO

www.wfco.org ~ 970.407.7000 ~ www.uwaylc.org

A volunteer initiative founded by the United Way of Larimer County and the Women's Foundation of Colorado

resources



Photograph courtesy of Santa Cops

SANTA COPS

For the last 20 years, Santa Claus has had some helpers in Larimer County – all wearing uniforms.

Since 1986, the “Santa Cops” program has helped thousands of low-income children in Larimer County have a merrier Christmas by providing them with gifts and a positive experience with a uniformed law enforcement officer. Last year alone, more than 200 officers helped deliver toys to over 3,100 children.

The organization is comprised of members of the Colorado State Patrol, Colorado State University Police Department, Fort Collins Police Services, Larimer County Sheriff's Office and Loveland Police Services. These volunteers give up countless hours to make the program a success.

Dawn Johnsen, a patrol officer with the Fort Collins Police Department, caught the Santa Cop bug 17 years ago, during her first year on the force, and hasn't been able to shake it since.

“I delivered and I just had such an incredible experience, I was hooked,” she said.

It wasn't long afterward that Dawn joined the board of Santa Cops. Each year she is involved in all facets of the organization, helping to take applications and wrapping and delivering gifts.

“A lot of times my interaction with these kids is not good,” she said. “But once a year, I can count on a positive interaction with the families.”

After 20 years, Santa Cops has a good system in place for its annual activities. In November, drop boxes are placed throughout Loveland and Fort Collins, where residents can donate new, unwrapped toys for the cause.

It is important the toys are donated unwrapped because the day after Thanksgiving, volunteers gather for the big wrapping party. All the toys are spread out and organized according to the ages for which they are appropriate.

The volunteers, using applications submitted by families asking for gifts, go on a mini-“shopping spree” on-site. A few gifts are selected for each child, wrapped

and put in a large bag with the application attached. The gifts are then ready for delivery on Dec. 16.

Santa Cops volunteers have found that the best way to find children in need is for the families of those children to apply in person on designated days and at designated locations. They do this to avoid any duplication.

“We never turn anyone down,” Betsey Nail, the treasurer for Santa Cops, said. “We rely on people's honesty not to apply unless they genuinely need it.”

Santa Cops continues to thrive through donations and various fundraisers. Every year, volunteers are amazed at the generosity of the community.

“I've been involved with this for eighteen years,” Betsy said, an accountant for the Larimer County Sheriff's Office. “When I started, we (Santa Cops) hardly had any money. The generosity in this county is just astounding. Even years when the economy has been down. People still end up pulling together and helping this project out.”

Santa Cops serves children from birth to age 18. There are two age groups which seem to have a shortage of gifts donated each year: infants and teenagers 11 and older. Most of the gifts Santa Cops receives are for children ages 3 to 10.

To raise money for its activities, Santa Cops holds an annual craft show. The handcrafted items sold are made by people sentenced to community service. It gives these people who are dealing with the consequences of a bad decision a chance to give back to the community.

Some of the crafts, such as blankets and wooden toys, become part of the gifts given out. The rest of the items, such as candles, jewelry, wreaths and wooden furniture, are sold at the craft sale. All the proceeds from that sale go directly to Santa Cops.

When you are thinking of ways to help those less fortunate this holiday season, keep Santa Cops in mind. Not only are these dedicated volunteers providing gifts, but also a chance for these families to have a positive experience with a uniformed officer. ❖

more info:

www.santacopslarimercounty.org

applications accepted:

Fort Collins

Larimer County Courthouse (200 W. Oak)

❖ Saturday, Nov. 11, 18, Dec. 2 and 9,
8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

❖ Thursday, Nov. 16 and 30, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Loveland

Old Larimer County Courthouse
(corner of 6th and Cleveland)

❖ Saturday, Nov. 11, 18, Dec. 2 and 9,
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

❖ Monday, Nov. 13, 27 and Dec. 4,
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Parents are asked to bring the following items when applying:

❖ A photo ID

❖ Social Security number, resident alien card, birth certificate or school record for each child

❖ Proof of address

(an electric or phone bill works)

❖ Gift ideas for each child

This information is just used to verify that adults applying really are the parents or guardians of the children and that they live in Larimer County.

donations needed:

❖ Books

❖ Toys

❖ Art supplies

❖ Clothing

❖ Games

❖ Monetary donations (no gift cards)

No amount is too small

❖ No toy guns please

❖ The organization tries hard to keep the dollar amount of the gifts given to each child equal. Because of this, they would prefer to receive a few less expensive gifts instead of one really expensive one.

craft sales:

❖ Wednesday, Dec. 6

Larimer County Courthouse
office building, 200 W. Oak

❖ Thursday, Dec. 7, 2555 Midpoint Drive