

## [Toy drive opens season of giving](#)

*Written by Susan Hunter – Valley Gazette*

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DERBY — The Valley Toys for Tots toy store campaign coordinated by Team Inc. has a new location this year, but its goal is the same.

The toy distribution and related toy collection events aim to make the holiday season brighter for more than 1,500 Valley children who may not otherwise find new toys under their Christmas tree.

“You people bring a smile to children’s faces,” Diane Stroman, Team Inc.’s vice president of development, told the business leaders and service providers gathered at the Toys for Tots kick-off breakfast at John J. Sullivan’s on Nov. 12.

Team organizes the collection and pick up of hundreds of donated toys, and family members who qualify may shop for the free toys at the toy distribution site.

This year, with more families out of work, there may be fewer people able to donate toys, said Richard Knoll, Team’s president and CEO, and more children need them.

In 2007, the toy campaign benefited 1,231 children, and that number increased to 1,453 in 2008. This year, the number is expected to grow further.

Knolls said that Team staff members worried last year that the poor economy might cut down on toy donations, but that wasn’t the case.

“We live in such a generous community,” he said.

Knolls and Stroman thanked Ansonia mayor Jim Della Volpe for donating space once more in his city for the toy store.

The toy store will be located at 153 Main St. near the Doyle Senior Center, on Thursday, Dec. 17 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday, Dec. 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Monday, Dec. 21 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and Tuesday, Dec. 22 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

People must fall within certain income guidelines to qualify to shop at the store and applicants must provide their child’s birth certificate and proof of residence and income.

Team staff members had already accepted 120 applications by Nov. 11, and expect that many more people will come to their offices at 30 Elizabeth St., Derby, through Dec. 15 to fill out applications. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.

When people apply, they receive Santa books with red, yellow and green tickets that correspond to the stickers affixed to the toys indicating value level.

Volunteers are needed to sort toys by value, age and gender, to code the toys and stock the toy rooms. Toy Store set up is from Nov. 10 to Dec. 14, and sorting toys begins on Dec. 7.

They’re also needed to recruit other volunteers, schedule work hours and help register people who are filling out applications at the Team office.

At the toy store, volunteer help is needed at the check-out line, to replenish toy rooms and help shoppers.

Volunteers can help by picking up toys at the drop off sites and transporting the toys to the toy store site.

“We have to start gathering toys for the kids in our area,” Knolls said. Many people left at the end of the Nov. 12 breakfast with large boxes and signs that will serve as collection sites for new, unwrapped toys that will eventually find their way to the toy store.

It’s challenging to know what to buy for the 10-12 age group, Stroman said, but she suggests gift cards to Hollywood Video, Blockbuster Video, Seymour Cinemas, Walmart, Bob’s Stores, Westfield Shopping Mall, Target and Marshall’s.

### **Toy collection events set**

Special toy donation events have been scheduled throughout the Valley. In Shelton, Fire Company #4 and Echo Hose Ambulance will host a “Meet Santa Day” on Saturday, Dec. 5 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Shelton Senior Center.

Each child who attends the event may give an unwrapped new toy, book or donation to benefit the Valley Toys for Tots campaign.

The event will feature photos with Santa, hot chocolate, cookies and activities.

In Seymour, The Yankee Clipper Barber Shop is hosting the 5th annual Christmas Breakfast to benefit the Toys for Tots campaign on Sunday, Nov. 29 from 9 a.m. to noon at the home of Diane and Tom Baklik, 19 Chucta Road.

Those attending are asked to bring a new, unwrapped toy for the toy store.

The event includes breakfast, music by Park City Pride and the arrival of Santa at 11 a.m.

Also in Seymour, the Seymour Police Department will collect toys for the Toys for Tots Campaign at Stop & Shop on Franklin Street on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The event will also feature free medical screenings and face painting.

### **Call Team to help kids**

To schedule a toy pick up or to volunteer for any aspect of the Toys for Tots Campaign, call Trish Wigglesworth at 736-5420, ext. 221.

New toy or cash donations are needed by Dec. 14.

Toys may be dropped off at the Toy Store site or at Team Inc. office or at toy drop-off sites listed on this page.