

Recession plays Grinch to holiday gift-buying effort for teens in foster care

By Lisa Bolivar

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MARTIN COUNTY — Christmas in a recession is bad enough, but try being a teenager in foster care. It's really a bummer, unless you are one of Carol's kids.

Most holiday toy drives cater to little children, leaving teens "in the system" without presents each year.

Carol Dryburgh, a Martin County employee who lives in Stuart, helps collect donations to benefit teens stuck in foster care. Through social workers with the Children's Home Society of Florida's Treasure Coast Division, she usually buys age-appropriate gifts each year for about 100 kids.

But not this year, said Dee Benjamin, development specialist at the Children's Home Society. The economy has taken a toll on donations usually earmarked for gift-buying.

"Last year they had a concert in the park and there were a lot of teenagers and families with kids. They donated a portion of those proceeds to Children's Home Society," Benjamin said. "According to the case managers, they look forward to her gifts because they are packaged beautifully."

Usually the teens are able to submit wish lists, but not this year again because of a lack of donations. Instead of spending about \$150 per teen, Dryburgh will have to severely limit the spending and purchase only generic items for fewer teens.

There still will be a benefit concert at the Martin County Fairgrounds on Nov. 19 where kids can pay \$5 at the gate to hear five bands; Joe Rocco of Otoo, Chaotic Curfew, The Guitar Workshope Kids, Points West and The Windtalkers and buy items from the bake sale from 6 to 10 p.m. Proceeds go to the Children's Home Society.

But the corporate sponsors who give annually either aren't giving this year or have cut back on how much they give, according to Dryburgh and Benjamin.

Benjamin said CHS serves about 9,000 children annually on the Treasure Coast alone, and there are hundreds of teens in foster care and young adults in a transitional program. Many times their wish lists are short such as a simple duffle bag to pack their clothes in as they are moved from home to home to home.

Dryburgh and her husband are taking money of their own by cashing out 40 hours of leave time in order to prop up this year's donations, she said.

"So now it became more of a quest for me," she said.

BENEFIT CONCERT

Area teens are encouraged to attend the annual Teen Benefit Concert at the Martin County Fairgrounds. Proceeds go to the Children's Home Society. Adults, corporations, business people who wish to donate may do so through Children's Home Society.

When: Nov. 19

Time: 6 to 10 pm

Where: Martin County Fair Grounds, 2616 SE Dixie Hwy, Stuart.

Cost: Tickets \$5; Bring cash for treats. Cash or unwrapped new gift items that are not glass or guns are welcome. Donations are tax deductible.

Information: Visit CHS online at www.chsfl.org, Treasure Coast Division. Or Contact Carol Dryburgh at Teenholidaygifts@Bellsouth.net



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