

SEND IN THE MARINES

Toys for Tots program brings gifts to less-fortunate kids

The holiday season is a special time for many reasons. For Christians, it's a celebration of the birth of their savior. For families, it's a time to reconnect and enjoy each other's company. And for businesses, it's a time of increased sales.

But for one particular group of people, it's the most exciting time of the year. Young children approach Christmas with a sense of wonder and excitement that can only be experienced by those who believe in magic. Their minds are filled with visions of Santa Claus, flying



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reindeer and, of course, mountains of toys under the tree.

Unfortunately, not all kids get to experience the Yuletide season with the same level of anticipation. For many families, it's a struggle to just put food on the table, never mind splurging on toys.

Fortunately, there's an organization that marshalls its forces to bring toys to less-fortunate kids. The Marine Corps Reserve has run the Toys for Tots program (toysfortots.org) since 1947. That was the year Major Bill Hendricks collected 5,000 toys for kids in Los Angeles. The following year, the Marines adopted the program nationwide. Walt Disney designed the Toys for Tots logo, which is still used.

The program involves setting up collection points for donated toys in communities all around the nation. Local sponsors, including Times-Shamrock Communications, publisher of The Sunday Times, coordinate with the Marines to collect and distribute the toys to children in need at Christmas time.

The Toys for Tots website provides useful information and tools for anyone who wants to participate. Donors can find local drop-off sites for toys or donate money directly through the site. Families in need can make requests for donations. Businesses or nonprofits that want to be sponsors or collection sites can set it up through the website. Participants can publicize upcoming events and post photos of them afterward. Volunteers also can make arrangements to help through the site.

The website actually is a combination of a national site and a collection of local sites. The national site has information on the mission and history of the program as well as links to participate and find local programs. The local sites are where you will find locations for toy drop offs near you.

The national and local sites are unified by color, navigation controls and typography. On the local sites, where they add their own information, the design is more amateurish.

Toys for Tots is a great way to brighten a needy child's Christmas. Donate if you can.

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