

## Charity group brings food, gifts together for local families

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*Jordan Miller, vice president of Santa's Helpers, and the Hotshots with Smokey Bear's team get ready to deliver presents and food to local*

Santa's Helpers, working out of First Christian Church in Ruidoso, brought together enough food and gifts to deliver Dec. 18 to 330 families, including 760 children, according to the organization's president Gary Collins.

Presenting families with food boxes, gifts and clothes for the children, numerous entities and individuals spread out across area communities delivering goods. Law enforcement and government workers like the state police, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, Ruidoso and Ruidoso Downs police departments and the Hotshots all pitched in.

Santa's Helpers is a Lincoln County non-profit organization. Families apply and meet certain criteria to qualify for help from the group. Items included in the families' packages include school supplies, personal hygiene products, books, toys and the food boxes, which include turkeys. Qualifying elderly people are also assisted with clothing, gifts and food.

The Hubbard Foundation has awarded the group with a \$2,000 grant this year to help Santa's Helpers continue to take care of all the applicants on their list. The group holds a Joy for Kids Toy Run each year in November, which earns 25 to 30 percent of what it takes to complete the project each year.

In this year's event, motorcyclists from around the area and from the Huns of the Southwest based in Alamogordo brought toys with them for the run. More than 100 motorcycles left O'Reilly's near the U.S. 70 intersection about noon, drove the entire length of Sudderth Drive and circled back to The Quarters in Midtown Ruidoso, where their riders dropped off gifts for Lincoln County Santa's Helpers.

Santa's Helpers Treasurer Tammy Mattingly said about 200 people participated in the afternoon of live music, a silent auction, raffles and cash drawing with 150 prizes awarded.

"They brought two truckloads of toys that with the toys in the parade filled our cargo trailer," she said. "We raised \$10,000, about one-third of the annual budget we need to serve the families."

"Without (Santa's Helpers) there would be nothing under the tree for my kids," one of the applicants told the Ruidoso News in November. "The kids understand that there's no money for Christmas. But I am so thankful that I didn't have to see their faces waking up on Christmas morning with nothing. I don't know if I could stand it. They were so excited. It meant so much to them."