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Students find joy in other kind of giving

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ARLINGTON — Mission Arlington's compound was buzzing on a recent Saturday morning as a crowd of needy people waited to pick up toys and gifts for their families at the charity's Christmas store.

The process ran smoothly because dozens of student volunteers were there to help shoppers pick out gifts, wrap packages and carry bags. The holidays are a time when many students rack up community service hours for their churches, for their college applications or simply for good will.

Student groups included Sam Houston High School's Key Club, French Club and National Honor Society; Student Council members from Martin High, Key Elementary and Gunn Junior High; Boy Scouts; and churches from all over Arlington and Mansfield.

"I've been doing this for the last six years," said Dalton Newton, an Arlington High School sophomore and a member of Fielder Road Baptist Church. "Before, I've just been stocking, but this year I get to help carry out gifts to people's cars."

The students said their main motivation is to help out, not fulfill college application requirements.

"This is a way to give back to the community," said Hugo Murillo, a Sam Houston junior and honor student who helped out by watching children at the mission's child-care building while their parents shopped. "This is my favorite job here, and a lot of [the children] just want your attention." Murillo has worked every year at the mission with St. Matthew Catholic Church.

His classmate Rasheeda Horn, a senior and an Honor Society member, said the children can be quite a handful.

"I like seeing them happy, but they do have a lot of energy," she said.

Martin students formed a gift-wrapping line to greet shoppers as they exited. Student Council sponsor Carolyn Powers said the group works two Saturdays every holiday season.

"People who come here are really genuinely interested in their kids," said Alexi Himarios, a Martin senior. "Once they've gotten their gifts and they're all wrapped, you can see the relief on their faces."

Hundreds of other school volunteers help Mission Arlington and other charities without leaving their campuses, said Lindy Phipps, an adult volunteer.

"A lot of the schools do canned food drives and other things," she said. "They do the things that bring the stuff in here so we can help out people."

Christmas store

Mission Arlington's Christmas store is open through Saturday to help needy families shop for free presents for their children. The store is at the mission's headquarters, 210 W. South St., and is

open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

It operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Proof that a family lives in Arlington and has children is required.

On Saturday, families from other cities will also be allowed to shop. About 25,000 people shopped at the Christmas store last year, said Tillie Burgin, the charity's executive director. A list of toy donations needed is on Mission Arlington's Web site, www.missionarlington.org. Burgin said children's books and gifts appropriate for teenagers — basketballs, footballs, curling irons and jewelry — are especially needed. For information about how to donate or volunteer, call 817-277-6620.

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Shelby Kelly, left, Blair Williams and Kimberly Weeks work at the mission.

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