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Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex has a bigger spot for handing out gifts this year

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Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex will begin handing out thousands of gifts to needy residents Dec. 12 and will have even more space to welcome families this year.

The need for services has been up about 20 percent all year long, Mission Arlington officials said. Leaders say they will easily top the 30,000 children they distributed toys to last year.

So the nonprofit decided in October to move its Christmas Store from a 10,000-square-foot space behind its main office to another building it owns nearby. It now has about 20,000 square feet for the store and seating space for a program about the story of Christmas.

Moving all the stuffed animals, microscope sets, board games and other Christmas goodies was a big task.

It s all come together with lots of help from churches all over town, said Tillie Burgin, the charity s executive director. "The Lord helps us," she said.

Burgin s organization is one of many preparing for a big December. The Salvation Army put up its Angel Trees at shopping malls in Fort Worth, Grapevine, Hurst and several other locations Nov. 13. It has taken gift requests from about 56,000 people this year, mostly children. That s up from the last few years, when officials kept the requests to about 50,000, said Patrick Patey, a spokesman for the Salvation Army s DFW Metroplex Command.

"That was a decision we made back during the summer simply in recognition that this economy was affecting a lot more families than in normal years and there were going to be a lot more people needing the help," he said.

Patey said it was a "bold step," and Salvation Army officials are praying that the community answers with increased support.

Mission Arlington also depends on the community. It get gifts for its Christmas Store from businesses and toy drives at churches and schools all over town. Besides extra room for toys, the new digs provide much more space for families to wait indoors, Burgin said. Before, some parents stood in line for two or three hours outside the doors to Mission Arlington s lobby to get gifts for their children.

"You re inside and out of the weather. We re excited about that because we know they ll be better taken care of," Burgin said.

Want to help?

Donated gifts for Mission Arlington s Christmas Store can be dropped off at the nonprofit s office at 210 W. South St. in Arlington. The store opens Dec. 12. Parents should come to the office and bring birth certificates, school registrations, apartment leases or other proof that they have children. To find a Salvation Army Angel Tree in a nearby mall, go to www.salvationarmydfw.org .

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