

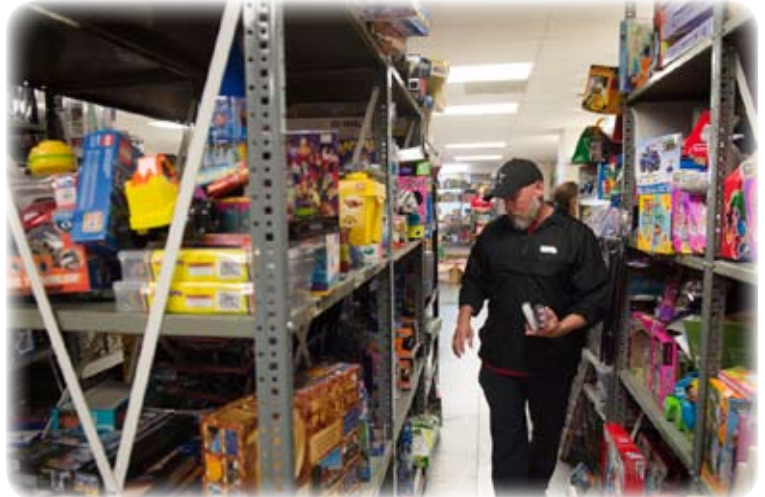
Monday, December 11th, 2017 5:00 a.m. - By Ken Costlow

Mission Arlington Christmas Store offers hope, providence to those in need

The market, in its 28th year, is run by hundreds of volunteers -- and one tireless leader



Gift Wrapping station at Mission Arlington Christmas Store (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice)



Behind the scenes a volunteer works in the gift stockroom (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Gift bags at the Mission Arlington Christmas Store (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



A volunteer spreads Christmas Cheer at the gift wrap station. (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Shopping assistants help choose Christmas gifts. (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Shoppers hear the Christmas Story (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



The Exterior of Mission Arlington in downtown
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



The Mission Arlington Christmas Store
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



The Mission Arlington Christmas Store
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



A girl scout volunteer wraps a gift at the Mission Arlington
Christmas Store. (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Volunteer, Shirley Gladbach, ready to wrap gifts.
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Girl Scout Troop 1611 helping with the Mission Arlington
Christmas Store (Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Volunteers working the gift wrap station
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Sam Houston High School NHS volunteers
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).



Volunteers wrap Christmas gifts for shoppers
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).

Tillie Burgin remembers Mission Arlington's first Christmas Store well. It was 1989 and the gifts to offer were rather limited.

"It started in my office with a basketball and a coat," she recalled with a smile and a slight giggle.

Twenty-eight years later, the free Christmas Store has expanded to the extent that it resembles a miniature Toys-R-Us and a Santa's Workshop all rolled into one.

This year's Christmas Store runs from Monday through Saturday, Dec. 9-23 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

If Christmas is a time for miracles, then the market that occupies the second floor of Mission Arlington's annex on West South Street -- in the heart of Downtown Arlington -- is all the providence that a person or family in need is in search for.

"Our store works, and it prevents homelessness," Burgin declared. "There are people being evicted from their homes and shelters every day, so we help them with their utilities, and we tell them to let us do their shopping for toys, trees and presents. Holiday time is a crisis time for many people."

As is the case with all non-profit organizations, there is a screening process that Mission Arlington has all clients go through, but it is a sympathetic process. Once the client's situation has been confirmed, then they are permitted to advance to the next step.

Before being allowed to enter the Christmas Store, the clients are presented the Gospel Story in their own particular language. Mission Arlington workers also take an opportunity to talk with each client and invite them to a Bible study in the vicinity of where they live.

Once they enter the store, they are greeted by dozens of shelves of complimentary toys, dolls,



The grand entrance to the Mission Arlington Christmas Store.
(Photo by Jason Waite / Arlington Voice).

games, arts and crafts and clothing of all kinds – all donated by benefactors of Mission Arlington.

Churches, businesses and organizations all over the city are the backbone of the work that Mission Arlington does. General Motors is a big contributor to the organization, Burgin said.

“The Lord has provided so much for us so that we can help people keep steady with what they’ve got,” Burgin said.

Burgin recalled one single mother that appeared at their door several years ago after having just moved to Arlington with her young child. She stood in line and waited patiently to get her child a toy. That same client is now an officer in the Arlington Police Department.

One of the highlights of having a place for clients to select gifts is seeing the expressions on their faces once they see the variety of items on the shelves.

“It’s such a joy to see the delight on their faces,” Burgin said. “They are so appreciative of what we have to offer for them.”

After Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc on the Houston and Gulf Coast areas of Texas in September, many refugees made their way to the Metroplex area looking for shelter until they were able to return home. Mission Arlington was there waiting for them.

“We’re truly thankful that we were able to help them,” Burgin said. “Some thought they would be able to return home right away, but many of them are still here. The school district was able to get their children into school and we were able to find apartments and places for them to live until they can get home.”

Burgin is a seemingly tireless worker, having been with Mission Arlington for more than 30 years after retiring from the Arlington Independent School District. It’s that same school district that has provided volunteers by the scores to help at Mission Arlington.

The Mission welcomes several thousand volunteers each year to work with clients, and there are spreadsheets to account for each volunteer and the number of hours they work.

