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Arlington GM employees give 30,000 children hope for Christmas

In what has become tradition, the employees at Arlington's General Motors plant contributed over \$120,000 worth of toys to Mission Arlington on Friday



The employees purchased over \$120,000 worth of toys, which will benefit over 30,000 children in North Texas (Photo by Russ Rendon / Arlington voice)

A time-honored tradition at the General Motors plant in Arlington is lifting the spirits of about 30,000 children throughout North Texas.

On Friday, more than \$120,000 worth of toys were loaded onto trucks and taken from GM's assembly plant to Mission Arlington where they'll be distributed to needy families

Richard Rowe is a material handler in the plant's body shop, and has been involved in the logistics of the Toys for Kids program since 2004.

The Toys for Kids program is a non-profit established within the Arlington GM plant that, largely through a payroll deduction, collects the funds needed to make the major purchase each year.

"It takes a collective effort between the union, opportunity," Rowe said. "We start the process of purchasing toys in September."

At wholesale pricing, the Toys for Kids program fills an impressive portion of the assembly plant floor with Barbie dolls, Hot Wheels, baby dolls and playschool toys. In addition to what goes to Mission Arlington, the program also benefits about 350 Angel Tree children, which are recommended through Child Protective Services.

"We couldn't do this without Mission Arlington's help," said Hilda Evaro, a quality control engineer who doubles as co-chair of the Toys for Kids program. "There's no way we could reach the hundreds of thousands of families the Mission can."

Evaro has been with General Motors for almost 19 years, and said she plans to stay with the company through retirement.

"For me, the program makes me feel warm and good," she said. "It's my way to give back to the community. We want to support the economy that helps us keep a job."

Employee volunteers and a handful of retirees hosted about 20 kids from Mission Arlington Friday morning with carols, cookies, and even a visit from Santa Claus.

The kids also visited employees on the assembly line and handed out candy. Afterwards, they were given an opportunity to sit on Santa's lap before receiving a stuffed stocking and several toys.

More than 260 bikes were parked neatly alongside the toys; a gift to Mission Arlington. Throughout the year, teams of employees contribute money toward the purchase of the bikes, which Rowe said he'll buy from Academy sometimes 30 at a time.

Affixed to each bike is a tag with the names of every employee whose money helped purchase the bike.

For first shift Business Manager Roland Frengler, the program is about paying forward good fortune.

"I'm really fortunate to have the opportunity to do the job I do and to be trusted and empowered by leadership locally," Frengler said. "Being that fortunate, I have a real desire to give back."

The Toys for Kids initiative has provided employees like Frengler the opportunity to give back for more than 40 years. The pay-it-forward approach helps GM build consumer confidence, which shows through the Arlington plant's recent milestone of manufacturing its 11 millionth vehicle, a Chevrolet Tahoe RST.

"I just want everyone to be safe and have a warm holiday with friends and family," Frengler said. "And remember the reason for the season."

This story is part of the Arlington Voice's 25 Days of Good News series