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Oakland Tribune, The (CA)

Salvation Army spreads joy to Alameda County

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Section: My Town

Cassie Harwood Oakland Tribune

OAKLAND — The Oakland branch of the Salvation Army will spread joy — in the form of toys and food — to 1,500 families in the city this holiday season with its Toy 'n' Joy basket giveaway program.

From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 21, and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dec. 22, low-income families and residents who qualified for the holiday program by Nov. 20 can pick up their baskets at the Fruitvale Salvation Army center on 2794 Garden St.

The baskets will be filled with three days worth of traditional Christmas foods, such as turkey, ham, potatoes and yams, and in some cases rice. But the Salvation Army's Alameda County coordinator, Major Patrick Granat, who is heading the program this year, said the baskets' contents should be sufficient to sustain a family for at least a week.

Granat said the demand for baskets will be larger than in previous years. He said some of those in need of help this holiday season were the same people who were donating food and toys last year. But the negative effects of such a role-reversal, which decreases donors while increasing the numbers needing assistance, has been mitigated by an increase in donations by those who can still afford it.

Granat remains optimistic: "This year, we don't want to overburden people with too much. I'm waiting for someone to complain, "That's too much! I can hardly carry it to my car!"%"

In addition to food, recipients with children 12 and younger will choose toys from a "toy shop," tables packed with playthings. Granat explained that giving parents the option of choosing their children's Christmas toys helps not only to designate age- and gender-appropriate toys to the correct children, but also gives parents with limited income a sense of involvement and dignity.

"Quite honestly, I've heard of charities that bag everything up, and the cars drive through and a volunteer just comes up and plops a bag of toys and a box of food in the trunk and off they go," Granat said. "To me, that's very impersonal."

Aside from Oakland, the Salvation Army will give baskets to 500 Hayward families and 500 families throughout Newark, Fremont and Union City, with a total of 2,500 recipients in Alameda County. According to Granat, the organization's Christmas basket giveaway has been held for at least 118 years.

The Salvation Army is still looking for volunteers to assemble and distribute baskets for its Toy 'n' Joy program, as well as for the meal it will provide at its 12th Street location on Christmas Day. For details or to volunteer, call

510-645-9710.

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