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Christmas Basket program begins

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Liberty High School Kiwanis Key Club members Katherine Buffum, left, Kenzie Westfall, right, and Mikey Santos help Jeff Schults (in cap) wrap donation barrels for the Brentwood Regional Community Chest Christmas Basket program. The barrels will be distributed to locations in far East County next week.

Photo by Richard Wisdom

The Brentwood Regional Community Chest is at it again, bringing back one of the city's most treasured holiday traditions – and one of its most unique.

BRCC's annual Christmas Basket program has been helping local families in need enjoy the holidays for more than 30 years. This year it will provide 500 families a

box of food, a turkey, fresh vegetables and bread, and a gift for each child. While assistance programs have sprouted up in the East County area since the BRCC began, the hands-on effort of hundreds of community members makes the BRCC effort unique.

“Rose Pierce began doing this with just her own determination, muscle and powers of persuasion,” said BRCC Vice President Rick Lemyre. “She used to let people know just what was expected of them to help out in plain, straightforward way, and people have been responding ever since.”

Brentwood Mayor Bob Taylor is responding in his own way for the second year. Last year, Taylor launched his “The Mayor Is a Turkey” campaign, collecting thousands of dollars – eight bucks at a time – to offset the cost of the program’s turkeys. The outpouring was enough to induce him to make a number of public appearances dressed in a turkey suit.

“My goal this year is 2010 donations of \$8,” Taylor said. If he reaches his goal, he’ll appear at the Streets of Brentwood for a “public basting.” Details of the basting weren’t clear as of yet, but Taylor is well on his way to spending an afternoon in an over-sized roasting pan. Wearing the turkey suit at last weekend’s Rotary Trade Club Dinner, he collected nearly \$700 in cash, plus a check from Rotary for \$500.

“This is what Brentwood is all about,” he said. “People helping each other out and having a good time doing it.”

Lemyre said that, as always, lots of volunteers will be needed to help out with food sorting on Dec. 17, and the distribution on Dec. 18. In the meantime, he encouraged people to seek out the many donation barrels located around town and fill them up.

“Last year was the first time we partnered with the Marine Corps League and their Toys For Tots program, and we couldn’t have had a better partner,” he said. Barrels

and boxes will be hitting local stores, banks and businesses in about a week, clearly marked with "Community Chest" and "Toys For Tots" signs so donators know where to leave their gifts for families in Brentwood, Knightsen, Byron and Discovery Bay.