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Christmas Basket tradition continues

By Kyle Szymanski

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Brentwood NAPA Auto Parts owner Linda Wilson and grandson Jack O'Donnell deliver a \$4,000 check to Brentwood Regional Community Chest's Lill Pierce. Brentwood NAPA has been a strong supporter of the BRCC for years, serving as a drop-off site for food and toys all year, and donating the proceeds of its annual Car Show.

Photo by Richard Wisdom

While many East County residents are busy shopping for Thanksgiving and Christmas, a dedicated bunch is gearing up for an annual canned food and toy drive that has been part of far East County's holiday tradition for more than four decades.

In just over a month, the Brentwood Regional Community Chest (BRCC) will join with volunteers to pack and distribute toys and non-perishable food for families in need. The program serves families in Brentwood, Byron, Discovery Bay, Knightsen and Bethel Island. Oakley residents are served through Friends of Oakley, who launched their own program with BRCC's help five years ago.

"These are my two favorite days of the year," said Lill Pierce, a member of the BRCC board and daughter of the late Rose Pierce, who founded the program from her Brentwood porch more than 45 years ago. "This community has always been generous with us."

Locals are encouraged to donate toys and non-perishable food by placing them in one of the 50 barrels and bins that have popped up this week at local businesses, banks, post offices and elementary and middle schools around far East County.

"Everything people donate – food, toys or money – stays right here in far East County," Pierce said. "My mom believed in the community helping its own and I believe the same thing."

About 600 families were served by the BRCC last year, receiving a box of non-perishable food, a frozen turkey, bread, vegetables and an age-appropriate toy for each child in the family. The BRCC expects to serve as many families this year, although donations have declined.

"There is a lot of need out there," said BRCC board member Jeff Schults. "There is a lot of need everywhere."

For many, the BRCC's annual program is more than the typical holiday assistance effort. Hundreds of Scouts, church groups, families and individuals have made an annual tradition to help sort, pack and distribute the baskets part of their hands-on effort to bring comfort to their neighbors.

Volunteers – come one, come all – are needed for the packing and distribution events, held Dec. 14 from 4 to 10 p.m. and Dec. 15 from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Brentwood Elementary School, 200 Griffith Lane. Children under parental care are welcome to help.

“What’s cool is it allows those who don’t have the resources to donate to give back with their time,” Schults said. “People should donate because it is the right thing to do,”

Recipients can register Nov. 25 from 1 to 3 p.m., Nov. 28 from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. or Nov. 29 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Brentwood Senior Center, 193 Griffith Lane. They’re encouraged to sign up early, as space is limited. Recipients must show proof of identity and residence by a driver’s license or identification card and utility bill.

For more information, call Pierce at 925-634-3216. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to BRCC, PO Box 850, Brentwood, CA 94513.