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Community Chest holiday basket event helps more than 300 needy families

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The Brentwood Regional Community Chest held its annual holiday basket program on Dec. 17, giving out non-perishable food, holiday dinners and toys to families who need extra help this holiday season.

Attendees were provided with a warm breakfast as well, courtesy of the Brentwood Rotary Club.

This year's event was successful in that an estimated 350 families came to the Brentwood Senior Activity Center for assistance, according to Lill Pierce, an organizer at the Community Chest and a relative of the organization's founder.

Families from Brentwood, Byron, Discovery Bay and Knightsen were eligible to register to receive the baskets. Oakley and Bethel Island residents are served by the Friends of Oakley organization, who held a separate event on Dec. 11.

Community Chest volunteers gathered in the Brentwood Elementary School cafeteria on Friday, Dec. 16 to pack the boxes of food before distributing them from 7:30 a.m. until noon the following morning. Much of the food, as well as toys and other items, was donated by residents who dropped off supplies in barrels and bins that had peppered East County since mid-November.

The Community Chest was founded by Rose Pierce more than 50 years ago, according to the organization's website. Pierce founded the Delta East Coalition to collect money and food for needy families throughout Contra Costa County before the program evolved into the Brentwood Regional Community Chest. A moment of silence is held each year on the Friday night of packing in honor of Pierce, who died in 2006.

The program is largely dependent on the support of individuals, families and businesses, according to the Community Chest's website. Lill Pierce said that support is not hard to come by. "People are very generous with their time and funds," she said. "Our community has been very supportive of its own, with people and businesses coming together to help out those who need it."

More information about the Brentwood Regional Community Chest can be found at www.brcchest.org.