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Community comes through again

by Rick Lemyre

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Brentwood Regional Community Chest volunteers distributed 40 tons of food and 3,000 toys last weekend. Above, the ceremonial ribbon is cut during Friday's proceedings. Chamber of Commerce ambassadors hold the ribbon as BRCC co-presidents Kevin King (scissors) and Dana Eaton (ready to assist in case Kevin can't hack it) do the honors. Also pictured are Gloria King, Jenn Derkson, Julie Hill, Mike Davies, Dirk Zeigler, Lill Pierce, Rusty Erlich, Craig Bronzan, Rick Lemyre and Mike Carrier. A few key members are missing from the picture because they wouldn't stop working for the photo op, and the Marine Corps League Detachment 1155 in Brentwood and the Corps' Toys for Tots program had already done their part. Photo by Richard Wisdom

In a year when need is greater than in years gone by, the people of East County have risen to the occasion once again.

"It's unbelievable how much people around here have given," said Marla Krieg of Byron as she looked over the organized chaos that swept down on Brentwood Elementary last weekend. "All this food, all those toys. And they don't just donate, they come down here and help get it to the people who need it."

The event last Friday and Saturday was the annual Brentwood Regional Community Chest Christmas Basket Program, now well into its fourth decade. This year, 550 local families received a large box of food, a frozen turkey, fresh vegetables and bread, and toys for each child in the family.

The BRCC even had enough to lend a hand to a half-dozen other charitable efforts in need of toys, food or both. Altogether, the BRCC this year distributed more than 40 tons of food and 3,000 toys.

"It really brings the Christmas spirit home and helps me concentrate on what the season's all about: giving," said volunteer Shanon Morton, one of hundreds of helpers who turned out to sort, pack and distribute the baskets.

"It's a wonderful day for me," said Lill Pierce, a member of the BRCC board and daughter of the late Rose Pierce, who founded the program from her Brentwood porch. "It's my favorite day of the year."

And while individuals by the score lent a hand, there was no shortage of community groups, agencies and organizations pitching in. Brentwood Rotary provided its traditional free pancake breakfast; Brentwood elementary school district students provided tons of food and hundreds of toys, and the district provided facilities and volunteers; the Marines' Toys For Tots program helped provide toys; and the City of Brentwood chipped in with warehousing, garbage bins and police services. Scout troops, baseball teams, churches and innumerable other groups were there, too.

"We're usually playing bunko and drinking wine on Friday night," Dee Clausen of Brentwood said with a smile. "We'll probably feel a lot better tomorrow for having done this."

Mayor Bob Taylor was on hand for Saturday's distribution, but his greatest contribution had already been made. Totals are not yet in, but his The Mayor is a Turkey campaign raised more than \$4,000 to help the cause.

"This is what sets Brentwood apart," he said. "People really care about each other. It's what Brentwood is all about."

Rick Lemyre is a member of the BRCC board of directors.