

For Country Santa, it's all about kids

Volunteers, donations help brighten holiday for 3,000

By Julie Howle

STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvillenews.com

As the days march deeper into December, the spirit of Christmas radiates from a small workshop in Pumpkintown, where in the coming weeks toys of all kinds will pass through on their way to of kids in need.

There are toys piled wall to wall and floor to ceiling, shelves bursting with trucks and basketballs, stuffed animals and dolls.

It's the 31st year that Pumpkintown resident Buddy Cox has been Country Santa. He and his volunteer crew collect, sort and bag gifts to be delivered to kids in need in the Upstate on Christmas Eve.

For everyone involved, it's all about those kids.

"I've seen their faces light up," Cox said.

Last year, they lit the faces of about 3,000 kids, babies to age 18, in Pickens, Oconee, Greenville, Anderson, Spartanburg and Laurens counties.

"For children that he helps, I think it means Christmas or no Christmas," said Melanie Wagner, a Clevelan resident, who recently brought her three daughters and son to Country Santa's place to help organize and bag toys.

Wagner said she and her children, who are home



JULIE HOWLE / Staff

Buddy Cox, also known as Country Santa, helps 6-year-old David Wagner select and bag toys for children in need.

YOU CAN HELP

■ Contact Country Santa at www.countrysanta.org or at 898-4422.

A list of drop sites can be found on the Web site.

■ Share your stories of kindness at GreenvilleOnline.com/kindness

schooled, help Country Santa every year as a project that teaches the joy of giving.

It's a lesson Cox and his fellow volunteers, or elves, know well.

To be Country Santa, Cox shuts down his sales engineering company each December and puts in days lasting 12 to 14 hours. Eight to 10 "hardcore" volunteers

work "pretty much non-stop." Churches, school groups, scouts and senior citizens pitch in, Cox said.

Cox said they need more volunteers and donations of toys and money.

"We're not backed by any major organization. We're not backed by any big fundraising group," he said. "This is 100 percent volunteer people, and to me that's what makes it even more special."

Cash donations are "trickling in" now, but Cox hope things will pick up. Toys can be given at drop points across the Upstate.

"We live and die by what people donate to us," he said.