

Country Santa needs your help

**By Olivia Fowler
Staff Reporter**

Country Santa is cranking up for action and needs volunteers.

Buddy Cox, the founder of the charity, is once again planning to bring Christmas to children who rely on Country Santa to remember them Christmas morning.

This is the 28th year Country Santa will make his rounds. Country Santa is certified as a charitable organization by the Office of the Secretary of State for South Carolina.

Last year, the organization distributed close to \$140,000 worth of toys and gifts to more than 2,000 children in the Upstate.

Every penny and every toy donated goes directly to needy children. Some of the money donated is needed to buy batteries for any toy which needs them, as Cox said no child gets a toy without an installed battery.

Cox said most of Country Santa's recipients live in Pickens County, although toys are delivered to other areas in need.

He said he is already collecting names from schools, United Christian Ministries and SHARE, sources he finds reliable for locating children whose families can't provide a visit from the North Pole Santa.

Cox will shut down his office for the entire month of December and he, his secretary and a host of volunteers will commit their time to the project.

Pizza Inn and the *Pickens Sentinel* have already signed on as drop off locations for people donating toys.

Cox says that new, not used, toys are requested as Country Santa does not have the manpower or resources to clean or repair used toys. Cash donations are also accepted.

Country Santa needs toys for children ages one-month through 17 years.

All types of balls are needed including baseballs, bats and gloves, basketballs, footballs and soccer balls.

Dolls and doll accessories are important items also.

Games needed are checkers, hangman, Bingo, Battleship, Game of Life, Monopoly, Chutes and Ladders, Sorry, Clue, Scrabble, Operation and Connect Four.

Legos, 24 to 1000 piece puzzles, trucks of all kinds and sizes are good choices.

Gifts needed for teens are

curling irons, hair dryers, jewelry, makeup, manicure sets, radios (small battery powered), tools, umbrellas, wallets and watches.

Even though country Santa does so much, Cox worries that the need can't be met.

"It's going to be a tough year," he said. "It gets to a point where you can't do anything more within the time frame," he said.

"We only have so much manpower, so much time, and so many resources," he said.

They begin collecting toys from drop sites after Thanksgiving. Volunteers pick up toys, then take them back to Santa's Workshop in Pumpkintown.

On December 23, hundreds of 30-gallon garbage bags are packed for children. The toys are sorted for specific ages and genders. It's a time consuming process.

Once a Santa pack is completed, it joins a line of other packs, which are secured with duck tape. Miles of duck tape are used each year.

On Christmas Eve, volunteers start the delivery of Santa packs. Each child on the list gets something.

It's a great community service project for clubs, organizations, or individuals who just want to help, and it is the only way many children receive any gift at Christmas.

Anyone interested in helping Country Santa can call the Country Santa line at 864-898-4422 for more information. If no one answers, leave a message and the call will be returned.

Volunteers may also visit Country Santa's web site at www.countrysanta.com.