

Country Santa seeks to plump up gift supply

More toys sought this year to give to kids in need

By Julie Howle • STAFF WRITER • December 7, 2008
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Tucked inside a workshop in Pumpkintown, Country Santa and his army of elves are already hard at work in hopes of making Christmas brighter for thousands of kids in need.

It is here, where floor-to-ceiling shelves are stuffed with toys, that volunteers put in hours of work, sorting and bagging gifts to be delivered throughout the Upstate on Christmas Eve.

This is the 30th year that Buddy Cox, better known as Country Santa this time of year, has been doing the program.

"In every bag that we send out to the families, it says with love from Jesus and Country Santa," Cox said with a smile.

"We're not blurred by what the real meaning of Christmas is here," he said. "If we give hope to some of these families, if we give joy to these kids and make their life a little bit happier for a short period of time, I think that's a part of it."

Cox said he and the other volunteers collect new toys that are donated at drop points throughout the area. The toys are then bagged and delivered to children in need on Christmas Eve.

Last year they helped more than 3,000 kids, he said, but donations were also down 30 percent.

Cox said that if donations don't pick up and stay at a strong level this year, Country Santa will have to cut back.

"We collect donations from the public and totally depend on the public support," he said. "It's a pure volunteer effort, grassroots effort."

He said it's too early to tell how the donations will be, but said that so far they "haven't been the best that we've seen before."

This year they hope to serve at least 1,000 families, which translates into around 2,500 kids, Cox said.

Country Santa helps children, from birth to 18, in Pickens, Greenville, Oconee, Anderson, Spartanburg and Laurens counties.

"It means they'll have a Christmas on Christmas morning," said Vernon Beigay, who has volunteered with Country Santa for years.