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**Toys for Tots toy distribution outshines the rain;
*Spirit of Christmas prevails***



Tri-County Toys for Tots Coordinator Bryan Chrisp surveys a truckload of toys with his son Johnathan Chrisp, one of the volunteers before the start of the event on Friday.

By Terry Witt, Correspondent

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CHIEFLAND -- Volunteers for the United State Marine Corps Reserve's Tri-County Toys for Tots program weathered hours of steady rain Friday (Dec. 14) to give away presents to parents, grandparents and guardians of the approximately 800 children this year.



Parents, grandparents and guardians stand in line under umbrellas waiting for the toy giveaway to begin.

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Beverly and Madison Goodman dressed appropriately for the rainy weather. Beverly is the Tri-County Community Resource director.

Krystal Bowling and Hannah Weaber, 5, braved the rain in good spirits.



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Georgia Downing hands a bag of toys to a helper from the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office on the ground as fellow volunteer Levy County Sheriff's Office Victims Advocate Aubrey McKenzie watches. The two young women volunteered their time. This event is entirely volunteer powered.



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The Toys for Tots banner marks the back of the distribution site.



Volunteer A.D. Goodman unravels ropes ahead of the start of Toys for Tots event on Friday.

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This was the first of three distributions at the Walmart parking lot in Chiefland for families in Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties. There were two more on Saturday (Dec. 15) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Most of the adults stood under umbrellas as they waited in line to receive their bag of toys from high school girls and adults working from the back of a semi-trailer at the Walmart Supercenter parking lot in Chiefland.

The rain was steady, cold and relentless for the entire event. Friday's giveaway was for people with last names starting with the letters A-M. On Saturday, people with last names starting with letters N-Z are scheduled to get their toys. People who weren't able to attend opening day activities can come today (Saturday, Dec. 15) between noon and 3 p.m.

Toys for Tots preregisters all recipients of the toys.

The recipients are vetted first to ensure they meet the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines. If they are receiving Medicaid or food stamps, then they can use those programs as proof of eligibility.

Bryan Chrisp, coordinator of the Tri-County Area and Alachua County Toys for Tots programs, said the Marine Corps Reserve doesn't exist in the Tri-County Area. The Marines still sponsor Toys for Tots, but they rely on local coordinators like him to handle the program. He volunteered to take over both programs after the coordinators stepped down. He will head to Alachua County after he finishes with Tri-County Toys for Tots Saturday. He said presents for 2,100 children will be given away there.

Tri-County Community Resource Center Director Beverly Goodman also was actively involved in the Toys for Tots giveaway Friday. Before the event started, she shared up-to-date information about the status of the giveaway on the resource center's Facebook page.

Chrisp, who was active in the United States Marine Corps for five years, was asked why he volunteers for Toys for Tots. He said he was raised in a military family. His father, a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars post, believed in giving back to the community as a volunteer.

"I just continue to serve as he did. That's what Toys for Tots is all about," Chrisp said. "The U.S. Marines give back to the community."

Chrisp said it has been a challenging year to collect toys. He said they often rely on the pond-lighting event at North Florida Regional Medical Center in Gainesville to collect toys, but this year, it rained at the event and dampened turnout.

He said hospital staff and executives passed the hat and collected \$700. The Walmart Distribution Center in Alachua also collected four pallets of toys.

Chrisp said everyone who volunteers for Toys for Tots is giving up their personal time for one purpose.

"We do it for the kids," he said. "Our heart is for the children. We don't want them to lose hope. If a child goes without for a new toy at Christmas even once they begin to lose hope. They begin to think no one cares."