

Area Toys for Tots shortage worries U.S. Marines

By RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Donations to the Toys for Tots holiday charity are so far behind last year's pace in the Wayne/Oakland area that officials have all but given up hope that their goal of 80,000 toys will be reached.

"We're all just busting our butts to collect as many toys as possible," said Kathy Schweitzer of Coldwell Banker Schweitzer Real Estate, one of the sponsors. "We're doing more than we ever have. (But) it's kind of disappointing."

The chief sponsor of the Toys for Tots program is the U.S. Marine Corps. Soldiers traditionally collect donated toys from drop-off points and distribute them to agencies that give them to needy children.

This year's goal of 80,000 toys will likely not be reached, said Lt. Col. Rich Scott of the 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, headquartered in Detroit.

In fact, Scott reports that collections lag behind last year's by 20,000 toys so far.

"A toy really isn't a frivolous thing," Scott said. "It plays an important role in a child's development."

Noting that the Marines, who landed in Somalia recently, were met by a horde of reporters, Scott said, "I'd give anything to have that much media coverage (for this program). It's only the public that can make this happen."

Other local charities, however, seem to be doing well, if not quite as well as last year.

State Sen. Michael Bouchard,

R-Birmingham, is part of a program called Coats For The Cold, whereby charity-minded individuals donate old winter coats for the needy.

"I just had to make two pickups because the boxes were overflowing," said Bouchard aide Gayle Murphy. "I need a truck, not a four-door car."

Murphy added that there are so many coats in Bouchard's district office that "I can't see out the window anymore. Gauging from last year, I would say (our collection) is right on the same level."

Ditto for the Salvation Army's Plymouth office, where holiday collections are "perhaps a tad ahead of last year," said Lt. Jeffrey Beachum.

Beauchum's area also includes Northville and Canton Townships. His goal this year is \$230,000, and he's about 60 percent of the way there so far. Traditionally, Beachum said, November and December fundraising accounts for 60-60 percent of the money raised by the Salvation Army each year.

All is not quite so well at the local United Way offices, where the 1992 fund-raising goals were missed, but more than \$60 mil-

lion was raised nevertheless in Macomb, Wayne and Oakland counties.

Jan Hubbard, spokeswoman for the northern Oakland County United Way, said she raised \$5,105 million by Nov. 12, the end of the fund-raising drive. The goal, however, was \$5,225 million. "It doesn't seem like much, but it makes a difference," she said. "It's really the economy. People are afraid even if they have good jobs."

The other local United Way office covers Wayne, Macomb and most of Oakland counties. Its 1992 goal was \$63.5 million, but collections totaled \$57 million.

"There's just not a lot of consumer confidence out there," spokeswoman Lynn Anderson said. "It's been a difficult year. (The problem is) a combination of employment and cuts in employee benefits."



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Not nearly enough: The holidays don't look too bright so far for the Toys for Tots people. They're 20,000 toys behind last year's collection rate. Shown above at one of the collection points, Coldwell Banker in Birmingham, are (from left) Ann Stevenson, James Riley, Sharon Shohz and JoAnn King.

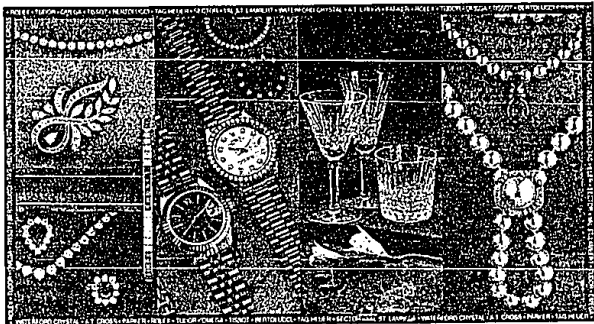
Note these holiday closings

All branch offices of the Michigan Secretary of State will be closed Dec. 24, 25, 31 and Jan. 1.

Offices will reopen after the Christmas holiday at 9 a.m. Monday, Dec. 28, and after the New Year's Day holiday on Monday,

Jan. 4.

Secretary of State Richard H. Austin urged motorists whose driver licenses or license plates expire during these four-day holiday weekends to renew early. Austin said 165 of the 180 office will be open until 7 p.m. Wednesdays.



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