



Volunteers at Santa's Helpers are busy packing Christmas orders for local youngsters this holiday season. A few of them are (l to r): Mary Alford; Vicky Phillips; Laurie Pritchett, assistant director; and Lou Ann Powers, director of Santa's Helpers.

## Santa's Helpers Provide Christmas Cheer To Underprivileged Children

Christmas will be a little bit brighter for those less fortunate this year, thanks to the generosity of local citizens and the efforts of the volunteer staff at Santa's Helpers.

Santa's Helpers, located at 216 West Main Street in downtown Dresden, is the collection point for donations to benefit needy families in the Weakley County area. It is also a distribution location, where the volunteer staff provides food, clothing, shoes and other items to the needy. During the holiday season, parents fill out requests for Christmas presents that include toys for specific ages of children. Youngsters may also receive shoes and coats.

Additionally, Santa's Helpers is providing Christmas food baskets to 25 deserving families in the area, this year.

Mrs. Lou Ann Powers, founder and director of Santa's Helpers, said, "We are as busy as we can be. We've been working day and night. I've even brought in my family, including my 11-year-old granddaughter, 18-year-old granddaughter and son, to help fill Christmas orders. We have a few volunteers, but not many. This week, we've been packing every night, and we could use volunteers during the day."

"We still lack about 200 children having all of the orders filled," she added. Mrs. Powers stated Santa's Helpers will fill a total of over 300 Christmas orders this year for local youngsters.

"A lot of the parents have asked for clothes, and we're trying to get everyone who asks for a coat, a brand new one. Some have asked for shoes instead of toys." She added that Christmas orders are being filled for newborns through 12th grade.

"It's fun to shop for the children," she said. "Melinda Pritchett has helped me shop since December 26, 2017. That's when the sales start."

During the week before Christmas, the staff of volunteers will be busy packing Christmas orders, so the store will only be open for pickup, food and emergencies on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. But they will open up for emergency food needs. "All they have to do is knock on the door," Mrs. Powers said.

"Dresden High School, as well as Dresden Middle School and Dresden Elementary did a food drive for us," she said. "Cash Express did a clothes and coats and toys drive. Churches have also stepped in and are wonderful to bring us food and monetary donations. It's the small country churches that are most involved. Some Sunday School classes give us a donation once a month; and I usually buy food with it." Additionally several area businesses have made donations of toys and food, including Dollar General Store in Gleason, which had provided about five loads of

items. Also, CVS and Fred's Dollar Store in Dresden and Plastic Products in Greenfield have made donations to Santa's Helpers.

Santa's Helpers does more than provide needy families with meals and presents for the children at Christmastime. The charity also assists needy families all year long that are in need of food, clothing, household items, and furniture. These items are especially helpful to those who have lost everything in fires, floods, tornadoes or other disasters.

"Last week, we provided food for 117 people in need," Mrs. Powers said.

She stated there were two or three house fires recently and these families are eligible for assistance. In such extreme emergencies, Mrs. Powers said even those from outside Weakley County would be helped.

When asked how Santa's Helpers got its start Mrs. Powers, who will soon be 80 years old, recalled that when she graduated college in 1961, she started teaching in Missouri and worked with children who lived in abject poverty. She stated they lived in homes with dirt floors.

"I learned what poverty meant. I came from an average family. I didn't know what it was like to go to bed hungry. These kids did. So, I kept food in my desk and we had a snack every day, and on Friday, I sent them home with clean clothes, so they'd have something to wear the next week. Some of them wore the same clothes all week long. They had no washer or dryers,

and some had an outhouse for a restroom. And, when I come to Memphis, Tennessee, it was the same thing. I worked in a poverty ridden school. When I came to Gleason, it was like another world. The people weren't rich, but at least they had food in their stomachs and clothes on their backs, when they came to school."

She continued working with underprivileged children when she moved to Weakley County by organizing Santa's Helpers in the mid 1980s. The first year, it was called the Christmas Program and four children were provided with toys for Christmas. The next year, the fledgling charitable organization helped eight youngsters, and it continued growing in number each year.

"Churches began hearing about it and wanted to get involved," Mrs. Powers said. "Teachers also wanted to help." Then, people began sponsoring the children.

"It's a fun thing to do, especially if you can pick out gifts for the children." In 1995, Santa's Helpers expanded its operation and began assisting families year-round with food, clothing, household items, and furniture. These types of donations are especially helpful to those who have lost everything in fires, floods, tornadoes or other disasters.

Over the years, Mrs. Powers, who is a retired elementary school teacher, has demonstrated love and compassion for the hungry and needy wherever she has been. This is especially true

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Happy Holidays

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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS**

from all of us, to all of you.

*City of Sharon*

Merry Christmas

Rejoice in the  
Gifts of the Season

May Christmas deliver the best gifts of all to you and yours this year: Peace, Love, Health, Happiness & Friendship

Merry Christmas, and best wishes for a blessed New Year.

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**Merry Christmas, Friends!**

*Signs of the season are all around,  
and that means it's time to express our appreciation to all of our neighbors and friends.  
We hope you enjoy this special time surrounded by the ones you love, and hope the coming year brings lots of glad tidings your way.*

**Weakley County Ambulance Service**