

Making Christmas merry

Santa's Toy Shoppe brings holiday to area children

By Traci Chapman
Staff Writer

It's not running into a burning building or racing to save someone in a medical call, but for Mustang firefighters an annual effort they make can mean the difference between a child having a merry Christmas and it being perhaps just another day.

"We all have such great memories of Christmas and for a lot of children, the best parts of it are seeing Santa and those gifts under the tree," Mustang fire captain Andy Willrath said. "But for some families that's a real problem – and it's a torture for parents who want to do all they can to make that day extra special for their kids."

That's why Willrath and other firefighters jump in to help through their longtime efforts at Canadian County Santa's Toy Shoppe. The program is a collaboration of several fire departments and other organizations, set up as an actual store where parents can pick out gifts their child is hoping for that year.

This year the need is even greater than usual, due to the novel coronavirus and families who might not usually face such dire situation in trouble due to pandemic's financial fallout.

"We have people who've lost their job or who have just come on hard times and realize they can't find a way to give their kids presents for Christmas– we always want to be able to do something to help them if we can," Willrath said. "Being a part of this just brings you the real meaning of Christmas – it's just incredible."

COVID-19 also for the first time necessitated some changes to how the program operates – so both those benefiting from it and those reaching out to help stay safe, Willrath said.

"We have a website for applications and we will be doing sanitizing of the toys," Willrath said. "Timing will be very important too as we need to sort the toys earlier to allow for proper sanitizing – we will be following all of the CDC guidelines, so this will not doubt slow us down a bit."

Hundreds of families participate in the annual Toy Shoppe, with Willrath



Santa's Toy Shoppe, in Mustang spearheaded by Mustang Fire Department, gathers thousands of toys for area children each year.

estimating about a third of those live within the Mustang School District. The Toy Shoppe is a collaboration of several fire departments and other organizations, set up as an actual store where parents can pick out gifts their child is hoping for that year.

Any help is always needed – volunteers ask for unwrapped toys, bikes or other items, while cash donations are also appreciated, Willrath said, and can be used to purchase specific items in short supply.

While it's a blessing to those who need it, Willrath said it is also an amazing experience for those who take part, either by donating or working during the actual distribution.

"Doing it this way brings back to the entire family that Christmas feeling you remember when you were a child," he said. "Santa happens for those kids Christmas morning."

Donations can be taken to Mustang Fire Department, located at 465 W. state Highway 152, through Christmas Eve, Willrath said. Anyone wishing to apply for inclusion in Santa's Toy Shoppe can do so by going online to <https://www.ecctoyshoppe.com>.



December 5, 2020, 3–9pm

Harrah Heritage Park
1374 N Church Ave

ALL DAY EVENTS

SANTA'S WORKSHOP

FOOD TRUCKS

VENDORS

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

KID ZONE

AFTER PARADE

PARADE

TREE LIGHTING

TRAIN RIDE

TOYS FOR TOTS COLLECTION POINT

FREE PHOTO WITH SANTA

Performance by

1 AMVRKA'S Jesse Scott



Parade Starts at Bradley St
travels SE to Church and ends
at the Park - Starts at 6pm



Presented by
Harrah Friends of the Park
harrahfop@gmail.com

