

Our Towns

A4 | THE DAILY HERALD | WWW.HERALDNET.COM | THURSDAY, 12.26.2013

These stocking stuffers find toys to love

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EVERETT — Many parents who struggle financially have turned to Christmas House this month for their holiday shopping. The all-volunteer charity each year helps put presents under the tree for more than 10,000 Snohomish County children.

Hundreds of individuals and groups help make the experience possible.

One of the charity's steady helpers is the Everett-based Gold Wing Touring Association Chapter C, dubbed the Evergreen Wings, which has held a stuffed-toy or clothing drive for Christmas House each year since 2008.

The motorcycle group's drives brings in varying amounts that fluctuate with each year's economy. This year's stuffed-toy drive brought in 900 new and gently used teddy bears, Beanie Babies, dolls — and one giant lobster.

"We're absolutely thrilled," said Kathy Leon, the club's toy drive



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Everett-based Gold Wing Touring Association Chapter C collected nearly 900 stuffed animals and dolls for Christmas House in this year's toy drive. Pictured (front row, from left) are members Donna Moore, Yvonne Rux-Wright, LeeRoy Kind and Deb Kaldestad. Moore's daughters, Shannon Wear and Tammi Havic (back row, from left), also helped.

coordinator. "Stuffed animals are a comfort item, and every child should have one."

Christmas House aims to let each parent select a stuffed toy for their child, Leon said. Some years there's not enough, and the stuffed toys are limited to younger children. The motorcycle group's two truckloads' worth joined

other donations to give as many children a toy as possible.

Until the Christmas House store opened at the Everett Boys & Girls Club this month, bags of toys were tucked away into motorcycle club members' garages, dens and back bedrooms. Donations came from retail stores, garage sales, storage lockers,

second-hand stores and a drop-off center set up each year outside Everett Powersports on Everett Mall Way, thanks to owner Mike Leibold.

Some fun facts Leon shared about the toy drive: Teddy bears make up more than half the haul. "Usually, they're 'naked,' but sometimes they're wearing little motorcycle jackets and

hats, Michael Jackson outfits, Superman costumes."

The Powersports drop-off this year received whole bags of gently used dolls, lovingly dressed in hand-sewn dresses and other outfits, as well as knit hats.

"We never know who those wonderful people are who donate those dolls, but we sure do appreciate them."

Elementary-age children have proudly donated some of their own stuffed animals to the effort.

Beanie Babies are very popular. So many donations of the small collectibles come in that "we're actually able to find that rare camel or octopus stuffed animal that a parent is seeking for their child."

This year's collection included a 3-foot red lobster, discovered gently used for \$1.29 at a Goodwill store in Aberdeen.

One of the best hauls for the drive came two years ago, when a couple called offering a bunch of stuffed animals they'd had in their car's back window for years. Leon said she worried she

would only find a bunch of sun-bleached, dusty cast-offs. Instead, she found more than a dozen immaculate toys that had been lovingly cared for inside an equally immaculate classic car.

Unlike most other groups, Christmas House accepts gently used stuffed animals, which means they must have no rips, stains, or broken or missing parts. Leon said it's rare that her crew ever has to toss a donation that isn't up to standard.

The motorcycle group has collected other items for Christmas House in the past, including clothes. Leon checks in with the charity each year to see what it needs most, and usually it's stuffed animals.

The 120-member club also donates the proceeds from its annual fundraiser rides to Christmas House.

This year's toy drive is over. To learn more about Christmas House, visit www.christmas-house.org. To learn more about the Evergreen Wings, visit www.evergreenwings.org.