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Homeless get some holiday warmth

by AnnElise Hatjakes

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Members of the local homeless population huddled together in the cold parking lot of St. Vincent's shelter on Tuesday, with frigid hands shoved in pockets. They were awaiting the arrival of a pick-up truck filled with blankets and other winter-resistant gear courtesy of the Guardian Angels.



Tribune/Debra Reid - Santa is greeted outside the family shelter in Reno on Tuesday.

"This is the first year that we've done this," Guardian Angel volunteer Scott Tootell said. "My wife went online and found the hats, blankets and gloves that we're giving out today."

Each bundle contains a four-by-five-foot red fleece blanket with the Guardian Angels logo, a red stocking cap and a pair of men's black fleece gloves.

The Guardian Angels organization patrols downtown Reno in groups on weekends throughout the year and during special events in hopes of deterring criminal acts, violent situations and drug transactions. Their regular route includes Virginia Street from the UNR campus to California Street and areas of Fourth Street.

"We're basically a more involved neighborhood watch group," Tootell said.



Tribune/Debra Reid - Homeless men and women were pleased with free blankets and gloves courtesy of the Guardian Angels on Tuesday.

Originally the group intended to raise \$2,000 to purchase 100 sets of the winter gear, but were able to raise around \$6,000 dollars and consequently purchase another 200 sets.



Tribune/Debra Reid - Blankets and gloves, courtesy of the Guardian Angels, had plenty of takers outside St. Vincent's dining hall on Tuesday.

"We sent out e-mails to businesses and set up a way for people to donate online, which helped us to raise money," Tootell said. "We started fundraising about three weeks ago and were worried for a while that we wouldn't be able to raise the amount of money that we were hoping to. One business donated \$1,400, and it seemed to snowball after that."

Tootell described the group as a great way to "give back to the community."

Fellow volunteer Erich Thompson was also looking for a way to give back to his community when he joined the organization.

"I like being a part of this group a lot," Thompson said. "I like to see that I can help make some people's lives a little easier."

One recipient said that the bundle giveaway provided for more than a way to stay warm.

"Getting the blanket was great, but what was even better was seeing that people still care," said James Hollins, who has been living in a tent near the St. Vincent's shelter. "I am so grateful and am happy to see how much people are willing to give even when times are tough."

Only one block away from St. Vincent's shelter, children were given toys by local motorcycle enthusiasts.

"Fifty children staying at the family shelter will receive two gifts each," city of Reno spokesperson Terri Hendry said.

The gifts were given to the children by members of the Northern Nevada Confederation of Clubs, which is composed of 38 different clubs.

"The motorcycle club was one of the groups that helped get the toys together," member Mike Marcum said. "The motorcycle club put on the 28th annual toy run on Dec. 13. We collected 2,000 presents and \$20,000 during the toy run."

The motorcycle club worked in partnership with Volunteers of America to organize the toy giveaway.

"The motorcycle club dropped off the gifts and we helped wrap them," said Debora Caruso, shelter director for Volunteers of America on Record Street in Reno.

Volunteers of America has been around for 100 years, and is new to Reno, Caruso said. "We haven't had to really ask for anything," Caruso said. "People are willing to donate anything they can and will call and just ask, 'What do you guys need?'"

Parents whose children received gifts were grateful for Volunteers of America and the motorcycle club's help.

"They were able to give our kids more than we were able to," family shelter resident Bobbi Hubbard said. "We have four children and we really appreciate everything they've done for us."

Bobbi's husband, Josh, said that he is very appreciative for what the shelter has done for his family, especially his kids.

"If it weren't for them, our kids wouldn't have a Christmas and if the shelter weren't here, we'd be out on the streets," Josh said.

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