



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department

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LAFD SERTOMA TOY DRIVE

The United States Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program began in 1947 after Major Bill Hendricks and a group of Marine Reservists collected and distributed more than 5,000 toys to area children in that first year. From 1947 through 2005, it had grown into a nationwide effort coordinated by the Marines, with an excess of 350 million toys distributed by Toys for Tots coordinators to more than 166 million children. These impressive figures do not include supplemental toys to local campaigns by the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation.

In 1976, there were 200 toys left at Fire Station 33. The Marines were contacted in an attempt to pass on the toys. However, the Marines had already distributed their toys for the year and were dismantling their seasonal Program.

Battalion Chief Rey Rojo of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) was contacted for guidance. He attempted to have the toys delivered to a number of hospitals for children in need, but his gracious efforts found him no luck when hospitals rejected his initiative. The "red tape" associated with the long list of gratuitous gift measures prevented the hospital from accepting the toys. Harbor General Hospital was the only hospital that would accept the toys. They were packed and delivered by Santa Claus in turnouts and all arriving on Task Force 85.

These events sparked numerous thank you letters to the Fire Chief John Gerard, and soon after, Chief Rojo

was asked to develop a pilot program for the LAFD to gather and distribute toys for the holiday season. This was the birth of "LAFD Holiday Toy Program for Needy Children" to collect and distribute toys during the Christmas holiday season. The department-wide Program was a success and toys have been collected and distributed since. Fire Station 3 was the initial large collection point where toys were housed before distribution. After which, the operation was conducted from old

Fire Station 30, followed by Fire Station 23 and old Fire Station 27 before its final move to the Frank Hotchkin Memorial Training Center where the operations continue to be run today.

In 1980, the LAFD Holiday Toy Program for Needy Children sought an Organization to help serve as its identity. The Sertoma Organization was approached and has been assisting in a joint role with the LAFD providing toys to 2.5 million children through the last 28 years. Sertoma means, "Service to Mankind," and with its

name, "The LAFD Sertoma Club" was formed. The members are all volunteers that are comprised of active and retired firefighters, intercity community people, and college students from fire technology programs of several local colleges. This small group coordinates with 430 agencies, including schools, churches, families, and the Marines as well as assisting the Highway Patrol and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) with toy pickups. All warehouse operational costs, water service, meals, pantry supplies, caps, and t-shirts, etc. are donated by Sertoma. This year's contribution by the Organization totaled \$7,582.

The 2005 holiday season was the most impressive year yet for the 28 Sertoma elves, assisted by 66 Santa helpers, who racked up 9,600 volunteer hours picking up toys from LAFD fire stations, sorting





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Our Mission

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WE OWE THE RESIDENTS OF LOS ANGELES

the highest quality of service possible, characterized by responsiveness, integrity and professionalism. We will continually strive for quality improvement.

WE OWE THE LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

our full commitment and dedication. We will always look beyond the traditional scope of our individual positions to promote teamwork and organizational effectiveness.

WE OWE EACH OTHER

a working environment characterized by trust and respect for the individual, fostering open and honest communication at all levels.

WE OWE OURSELVES

personal and professional growth. We will seek new knowledge and greater challenges, and strive to remain on the leading edge of our professions.

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through them, preparing toy requests, and distributing them to children in the Los Angeles community. The Program averaged 20-35 warehouse volunteers each day, seven days a week. Traveling is a big component with a total of 26,655 driving miles logged over the 30-day period. An average of 3,189 toys per day were picked up, sorted and bagged, tagged, and distributed seven days a week. Last year, LAFD collected 79,128 toys. An increase of 12,000 toys was collected in 2003. “We’ve broke all kinds of records this year, with 95,680 toys and 4,130 volunteer hours devoted to driving,” says retired LAFD Deputy Chief and Sertoma Club President Rey Rojo.



The LAFD Sertoma Club also collaborates with the KABC Channel 7, who provides media coverage for its “Spark of Love Toy Drive,” that helps with toy distribution in five counties. This year, the LAFD was selected as the lead agency and given \$25,000 to purchase toys and assist in dispersing them among the five distributing agencies. Chief Rojo is very proud of the honor and took on the task. Fire Chief William R. Bamattre is also a strong supporter of the Organization and its activities and is a Sertoma member himself. Sponsorship has been a major breakthrough for the Organization and its affiliation with Sertoma has made it all possible. Sertoma helps by allowing its name to be lent along with providing financial coverage in the form of insurance



for Sertoma sponsored activities. Toyota has been a major sponsor for the last three years as well, and has provided official Toy Drive vehicles for volunteers to pick up and move toys all around the city. The Toyota Tacoma’s display a festive holiday season magnetic decal on doors of the vehicles, labeled as official LAFD Sertoma Club/Spark of Love Toy Drive vehicles. This has enabled the volunteer’s vehicles

not to be mistaken for LAFD vehicles and misidentified in the course of their toy runs.

Temporary storage of the toys picked up has been a challenging task. The drill deck of the Frank Hotchkin Memorial Training Center serves as what the Organization refers to as “Toy Central.” This area is the focal point and serves as the storage area for toys, the central drop-off point and the location where the toys are packaged and sent. The offices and managerial logistics occur there as well. Furthermore, businesses and those who want to make documented charitable donations of either money or toys can do so and get a receipt at the Toy Central site.



Sertoma banners hang at this site along with those that hang at all 102 fire stations in the city notifying residents that the Toy Drive has begun.

The LAFD Sertoma’s season is not limited to the holiday winter season. It runs year round with over 2,000 toys in the Toy Central Warehouse for the LAFD to use to assist families that experience any kind of fire or disaster throughout the year for delivery within 24 hours. Additionally, this spirit extends to those with major medical concerns.

The beneficiaries will never forget the elves, wearing turnouts and helmets, on the big red sleighs. The “LAFD Holiday Toy Program for Needy Children” is a wonderful expression of the hearts of men and women firefighters who spend their lives caring for others.

Special thanks to Retired Deputy Chief Reynaldo Rojo for providing valuable input into this month’s Fire Watch.