

FAITH - Volunteers make cars for 'God's Kids'

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Colorado Community News, Centennial Citizen

04/28/2006

The staccato rap of the hammer accompanies the whine of the scroll saw and the growl of the sander as Holly Creek retirees create toy wooden cars for children they will never meet.

Almost every morning about a half dozen men gather in the wood shop at the Holly Creek Retirement Center in Centennial to make the cars for the project called Toys for God's Kids.

John Nelson, who had been working with wood for most of his life, oversees the project at Holly Creek.

"We got started in this program in early March after we attended a Toys for God's Kids seminar," Nelson said. "I donated all the equipment here in the shop to the center when I retired and we just felt building toy cars for poor kids around the world would be a better use of the shop."

Marlin Dorhout of Denver founded the program in 2000 after seeing the smiles on the faces of children when they were given hand-made toys during his trip to Nicaragua with Habitat for Humanity.

"The trip organizer asked us to bring toys for the kids so my friend and I decided to make up some wooden toys to take with us," Dorhout said. "The toys went over so big I figured this would be a good outreach mission when I retired. We are growing and we have sent out about 50,000 toy wooden cars since we started in 2000."

Currently, about half dozen locations are making the toys and Dorhout said there is always a demand for them since there are an estimated two billion poor children around the world who would like to have a toy wooden car.

Nelson said he brought the idea to Holly Creek and immediately had volunteers coming to the shop to work on the project.

All the materials are donated. The wood is large scraps from lumber companies, companies that make wooden window frames and other wood products. The wood strips are 3/4-inch thick and 1 1/2-inch wide and can be up to 12-feet long but are trimmed down to smaller lengths to make them easier to work with.

At Holly Creek it is an assembly line-like process. It starts as one of the volunteers traces out patterns for as many cars as possible on the strip of wood. The 15 available patterns vary in size and shape.



Jack Zobel uses a scroll saw to cut out wooden cars for the Toys for God's Kids project. Zobel and other volunteers at Holly Creek Christian Living Retirement Community in Centennial joined the project in March and have made 500 wooden cars to date.

The strip then goes to a volunteer who drills the holes for the axles and then it goes to a volunteer who uses the scroll saw to cut out the cars.

The cars then go to a volunteer using a router to trim away any excess wood from the pattern lines.

The last step in the shop is at the workbench where a volunteer glues a wheel on an axle, taps the axle through the hole in the body and glues the wheel on the other end of the axle.

From there, the cars are sent to Dorhout who does the finish sanding and dips each car in a preservative coating of linseed/mineral oil mixture.

The completed cars are stamped with the letters USA as a license plate and on the bottom of the car is message, "Toys for God's Children courtesy of Holly Creek Retirement Center, Denver, Colo."

Nelson said there is a lot of satisfaction making the toy cars.

"I just think making toy cars that will make kids smile is a good way to spend the morning," he said. "All of us here at Holly Creek are retired and this keeps us occupied working on a project that brings joy to little children who may not have a toy."

Dub Browning paused a minute from putting the wheels and axles on the cars to say he loves donating his time to the project.

"Woodworking was my hobby for much of my life so being here in the shop is a natural for me, and it is even better because I can work on this project," he said with a smile. "Helping make the toy cars is rewarding, particularly when you think about where they go. These cars go to many kids who may never have had a toy. We just feel like we are doing something good for needy children and that is time well spent."

A short distance away, Jack Zobel was cutting out the cars on the scroll saw.

"The guys sort of drafted me into the team as they invited me to join them working on the project," he said. "I immediately agreed because I've done woodworking most of my life and saw this as a good way to put my knowledge and skills to use."

He said, as he works, he thinks about being sure the job of making the cars is done right so a child can enjoy the toy.

"I also wonder a little where the car I'm working on at the moment might end up," he said. "Being here in the shop making toy cars is fun and you take a lot of satisfaction away from this project knowing you have used your time and skills to do something good for needy children."

Dorhout said he is pleased Holly Creek has joined the program.

"We always have more requests for toys than we have toys to give away," he said. "This is a strictly a volunteer project with virtually no funding. We can always talk to anyone who wants to donate materials or funds, we are always looking for volunteers who will make the cars for us plus we are always looking for ways to get the toys to needy children. Our whole mission is to provide sturdy, attractive wooden toys free to God's children everywhere."

To contact Toys for God's Kids, write Dorhout at P.O. Box 370061, Denver, 80237 or visit the Web site at www.toysforgodskids.com on the Internet.