

The VILLAGER

Toy cars zoom around the globe thanks to Holly Creek seniors

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For children who need them most

Submitted by Chuck Montera

Shirley James, Delores Meader and Jaci Draper assemble toy cars at Holly Creek Retirement Community in Centennial.

CENTENNIAL – Would you believe there is a manufacturer of cars made here in Centennial, who has distributed to more than 30 countries worldwide – and they accomplished this without a government bailout? It's true – the manufacturers are a dedicated group seniors from the [Holly Creek Retirement Community](#), who produce about 750 handcrafted wooden toy cars sent around the world each month.

Their “customers” are underprivileged children that, in many cases, are seeing a toy for the first time.

“We are always looking for new homes for our cars,” said Holly Creek resident Glenn James.

According to James, who is the “ringleader, about one-half of the cars they make go to organizations who have either contacted, or been contacted by residents at Holly Creek. The other half go to the local non-profit called [Toys for God's Kids](#).

“The toys end up in the hands of the children who need them most,” said Herb Bowman. Bowman drills the axels for each car. “I’m delivering 150 cars to a woman at my church who works with Project Uganda.”



These children in Bangalore, India, received cars through UEMI. Photo courtesy of UEMI

Russ Yost, an aircraft mechanic during WWII, said, “Our toys have made it to every continent except for Antarctica.”

According to Yost, the Holly Creek toymakers employ the same manufacturing know-how they learned during WWII to make their cars. The seniors at Holly Creek have produced more than 37,000 cars since 2006.

“It is important to note we don’t charge anything for the cars we make and we will not turn down any request for our cars,” James said.

While James, Yost and Bowman have been making cars since the program began, Bill Keebler is known as “the rookie,” having just joined the group a few months ago.

Keebler recounts why he is involved in the program.

“I was on a mission at an orphanage in Juarez, Mexico, when the pastor asked the children to pray for what they needed most. A tiny girl raised her hand and said, ‘I pray my mother comes back for me,’” Keebler said. “Our toys remind these children that they are not ‘throw-away’ kids and that they are loved.”

The woodshop is only part of the toy making and manufacturing process. The job of assembling the toys belongs to a group of eight women, who gather every Monday in Holly Creek’s art room to insert axels, glue on wheels, trace new patterns and stamp, “USA” onto each car.

“Making these cars is a wonderful way to make a child happy,” said Rose Gates, who traces the car pattern. “We have a lot of kids relying on us and we can’t let them down.”

During WWII, Gates worked on the assembly line of the Gates Rubber Company (no relation) in Denver.

The wood for the cars is donated by area businesses including Masterpiece Stair, All American Stair and Trustile Doors.

“This is our form of group therapy,” said Jaci Draper, another Holly Creek resident. “Not only are we helping children, the women who assemble the toys help each other by being able to connect and become friends on a much deeper level.”

Each month, Glenn James sends out a memo to all volunteers to update them on who they are making toys for. A recent memo reads:

- Cherry Hills Community Church – 160 cars for their mission to Juarez, Mexico
- Littleton Hospital – 50 cars through Rose Gates
- Abiding Hope Lutheran Church – 105 cars for their March 25 trip to Nelloie, India
- Valor Christian High School – 200 cars for their trip to Puerto Penasco, Mexico
- Christ Lutheran – 75 cars for Harrington Elementary in Denver and 150 cars for Project Uganda through Herb Bowman

The numbers tell the story – 740 cars sent this month to 740 smiling faces of children who are not forgotten and are loved by the retirees at the Holly Creek Retirement Community.

www.hollycreekretirementcommunity.com...

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