

Holiday Fund recipients EPA Kids Foundation, Truck of Love, CSA impact hundreds of families

By Shannon Barry, Reprinted from 11/21/07 Issue of the Los Altos Town Crier



The 2007 Town Crier Holiday Fund is under way, with the eighth annual fundraising drive that benefits 17 local non-profit groups that serve the needy in Silicon Valley.

This year, the Town Crier's goal is to exceed the 2006 total of \$197,000. Donations are disbursed to organizations that support low-income families, foster children, seniors and the homeless. To date, the fund is closing in on its first \$100,000.

This week, the Town Crier profiles three longtime recipients that focus on providing the necessary education and resources for long-term health and survival: East Palo Alto Kids Foundation, Truck of Love and the Community Services Agency's dental program.

East Palo Alto Kids Foundation

As a former teacher in East Palo Alto, Tasha Castaneda, president of the East Palo Alto Kids Foundation, has seen first-hand the benefits of the grants awarded by the foundation.

EPAK awards classroom grants directly to teachers in the Ravenswood School District in East Palo Alto. The organization awards a maximum of \$500 to teachers twice a year. In October, the foundation disbursed \$145,000 to offset the cost of classroom resources.

"We raise money and give small grants to educators in EPA to help fund the gap between the Ravenswood School District," Castaneda said.

An estimated 96 percent of the 4,500 students in the 13-school Ravenswood district come from families who face financial hardship. Seventy percent of the grants cover resources for literacy and language arts, Castaneda said.

Castaneda said the Town Crier Holiday Fund is one of EPAK's largest, ongoing benefactors, and the annual donations have had a huge impact on district students and teachers.

For more information, visit www.epak.org.

Truck of Love

Pete Fullerton made Truck of Love his life's work in 1972 after someone asked him to deliver supplies to an Indian reservation in Arizona. Fullerton said he was devastated by the malnutrition and substandard living conditions he witnessed.

"I felt such a profound sense of guilt that it changed my life," he said.

Although the San Jose-based Truck of Love grew out of his sense of guilt, it continues because of Fullerton's spirit.

"An important part of work is passion," Fullerton said. "It touches everyone when passion is there."

Fullerton wakes up in the morning, usually offering about an hour of his time to prayer, then packs up his truck with food and supplies. He makes eight to 12 stops per day, six days a week, delivering food, clothing, baby needs, medicine and transportation to the needy in the Bay Area.

He offers not only survival basics, but conversation and warmth. "When you treat people like brothers and sisters, it changes something," Fullerton said.

Fullerton is currently working with 150 families on a regular basis. He collects food from individuals, churches, schools and civic organizations, like the Rotary Club.

With a budget of nearly \$150,000 a year, the challenge comes in dividing donations among all the different families, he said. Most of the money is spent on food, but some funds are used for clothing.

"At the end of the day, if I have something left over, I felt did something wrong," Fullerton said.

For more information, visit www.truckoflove.org.

Community Services Agency dental program

The Community Services Agency, based in Mountain View, created its dental program seven years ago to improve the oral health of uninsured children and to provide dental education and preventative care to families.

Since the program's inception, 390 children have been served, according to Maureen Wadiak, associate director of CSA.

"The good news is, through this Holiday Fund ... we are slowly chipping away at the epidemic that was plaguing our kids," she said.

The dental program particularly benefits children in the Mountain View-Whisman School District, many of whom come from low-income families and might not see a dentist if it weren't for the volunteers dispatched to their schools to provide examinations.

The program, a collaborative effort between public and private agencies, aims to provide dental maintenance and routine checkups for needy children, Wadiak said. And because children's complaints of emergency dental pain have decreased, the program is expanding to include working parents' oral health-care needs.

The program requires patients and their families to meet with CSA staffers before and after procedures to learn brushing, flossing and eating habits that lead to healthier teeth.

For more information, call 968-0836 or visit www.csacares.org.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation, based in Mountain View, is the fiscal partner and provides tax receipts to donors who contribute to the fund.

Watch the Town Crier in upcoming weeks for more details about groups that benefit from the Holiday Fund.

Readers can donate to the Holiday Fund by making checks payable to:

Town Crier Holiday Fund, 138 Main St., Los Altos 94022.