

UC San Diego Students Help San Diego Families in Need for "Operation Santa"

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It's the holiday season, but with unemployment on the rise, helping those in need is especially critical this year. Students of the University of California, San Diego's community service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega, have stepped up to stage "Operation Santa," an annual fundraising effort dedicated to helping families in need all over San Diego County.

Due to the co-ed fraternity's outreach initiatives and perhaps because of the economic crisis, "Operation Santa" received a record number of donations this year and a record number of families were nominated to receive help from "Operation Santa."

Alpha Phi Omega's efforts for the project include raising money for gifts and food for all families. Many of the families the fraternity helps are led by single mothers, including mothers who are victims of domestic violence, facing illness, have experienced the loss of a family member and others who are struggling to financially support their family.

Last year, the organization put on a Christmas celebration for a woman with terminal cancer and her family on Thanksgiving Day. Family members weren't sure the woman would make it until Christmas.

Junior and co-chair of "Operation Santa" Angela Lee recalled when one mother said she couldn't even afford to buy food for her children. "I just want to give back however I can," Lee said.

Another volunteer, junior Tiffany Tsiou, said there's nothing better than walking into a home and seeing all the children get excited because you're bringing them Christmas.

"Operation Santa" was established four years ago and has benefited the San Diego community in many ways. Through the project, Alpha Phi Omega run fundraisers, including working concessions at Qualcomm Stadium and wrapping gifts at Barnes&Noble.

This year, for the first time, the organization partnered with other UC San Diego groups including the Pre-Medical Association of Students for Service, Alpha Kappa Psi, Women and Children Care Initiative, Health and Medical Professions Preparation Program, American Medical Student Association and resident advisors from Eleanor Roosevelt College. With the difficult economy "Operation Santa" is still looking for donations, both of money and of gifts, for more information and to donate, please contact apo.operationsanta@gmail.com

Other efforts to give back led by the UC San Diego campus community during this holiday season include:

UC San Diego Volunteer50, a key component of the university's 50th Anniversary celebration, the initiative encourages the entire campus community, including all students, faculty, staff, alumni and university friends, to perform at least 50 hours of volunteer service during the 2010-11 academic year. This holiday season,

Volunteer50 is promoting events dedicated to helping children. On Dec. 11, volunteers will work with Toys for Tots to help Marines sort new, unwrapped toys that will go to children in need.

The UC San Diego Staff Association's annual toy drive benefits children at the UCSD burn center, infant care center, mother, child and adolescent center, as well as the Bannister Family House. Community members are encouraged to drop off a new, unwrapped toy at several locations on campus by Dec. 15.

At UC San Diego's staff Annual Holiday Pancake Breakfast, the campus's Veterans Association is collecting clothing for the Veterans Village of San Diego. Jackets are especially welcome this time of the year, as are business clothes for male and female veterans.

There are plenty of opportunities to give time and donations between now and the end of the year. Go to the Volunteer50 website (volunteer50.ucsd.edu) to register to see all the initiative's events.

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