

More blessed to give than to receive? You bet


By JOSEPH W. BEAN

Children need a lot of things: air, shelter, water, food and evidence that they are loved, or at least wanted.


Hawaii is blessed with sweet air year-round. Shelter is usually calculated as being safe from the cold or the cruel sun. Again, Hawaii has that covered. Drinking water is not an issue, either. Food? That can be hard, but there are a lot of programs to help – more than 100 just in Maui County. It all comes down to evidence of love and appreciation. With the holidays just around the corner, that can be challenging.

Of course, parents love their children! Still, grown-ups do things that put children at risk. There are the obvious things: child abuse, abuse of other family members. Children know what goes on in their homes even when the violence is not directed at them, and they are affected by it. It is the nature of childhood to accept that the child is always the reason for every good and bad thing that happens. That's why the evidence of love is so important, it's also why an unexpected gift can make all the difference in the world.

That's where the Friends of the Children's Justice Center (FCJC) comes in... and be-



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To give generously or lavishly with the heart and not with expectation of return.

comes inexpressibly important. FCJC is there all year long. You can help any time, but your support is especially needed as Christmas approaches, when FCJC wants to remind every child in the justice system that someone cares by ensuring that each one receives something special for Christmas.

What can CJC do to get all those Christmas gifts? Maybe wish upon a star? The "real" answer is that Executive Randy Echito and the FCJC volunteers wish upon a lot of Christmas stars, and it works. Those Christmas stars are Maui people who understand that children matter, and that it matters for them to feel appreciated. One of the shiniest stars is Joan Martin of AXA Financial Services. Year after year, she finds



AMY HAMPTON photo

Santa gets a little help at One Main Plaza in Wailuku from, left to right, Deidre Tegar-den, coordinator of the county Office of Economic Development; Randy Echito, executive director of Friends of the Children's Justice Center; and Joan Martin, a financial consultant with AXA Advisors LLC.

ways to get friends and associates to put together heaps of toys for the children on the CJC client list. (Rumor has it that some special helpers even get homemade fudge for lending a giving hand.)

Donating toys for the kids in the CJC system is one of those rare opportunities to really experience what Christmas is about. You give without know-

ing who you are giving to, and take your reward in the joy of giving, pure and simple. Martin said, "It wouldn't be Christmas for me if I didn't do this."

If you still doubt the old saying that promises "it is more blessed to give than to receive," CJC is your chance to test your belief. Give some toys or other fun gifts for these kids who really need a lift, then grab a cup

of eggnog and see how you feel about yourself.

On the other hand, if you already know that giving is the most Christmassy of activities, go all the way: have a party, and ask your guests to bring toys instead of mac salad; or start a toy drive in your workplace. Whatever you're planning, get going now. It's true, Christmas is weeks away, but

the CJC volunteers need time to match gifts to children, sort and wrap and tag each one, and get it delivered in plenty of time. So, gifts have to arrive at the CJC offices no later than December 5.

Martin and her friends are not the only Christmas stars shining for CJC, but it takes a lot to get the job done. According to a letter from Executive Director Randy Echito, "Friends of the Children's Justice Center worked with over 25 agencies to assist 777 children ... During the Christmas season, we provided 1,250 gifts to children and their siblings."

If you can help with children's toys, dollars or gift cards (which are great for older kids), do it, but you don't necessarily have to make your way to CJC yourself. Just call the Realtors Association of Maui, 873-8585, to ask about a drop-off point near you. If you want to know more about how you can help CJC at Christmas or any time, call 243-8686 or e-mail Echito at randy@mauicjc.org.

By the way, if you work at One Main Plaza, expect Joan Martin and her elves to be knocking on your cubicle wall. Think of it as an opportunity to prove to yourself that happiness comes more from giving than from receiving.