



Suzi McCoy: Leading Christmas for All

by Rachael Smith | Jun 2026

FOR MOST people in Wilson County, the nonprofit Christmas for All is visible only for a few days each year, when hundreds of families line up at the former Hartmann Luggage building in Lebanon to pick up toys for their children.

But for Suzi McCoy, the work behind those few days lasts all year.

“I actually start planning the next year before we ever close the current year,” McCoy, the director of operations for the organization, said. “There [are] always things to do, people to contact, toys to purchase, and volunteers to coordinate.”

The nonprofit has become a lifeline for families struggling during the holidays. Each year, it helps thousands of children wake up to gifts under the tree — something that might not have happened without community support.

Christmas for All began in 2001 when several local organizations realized their individual efforts to help struggling families during the holidays could be stronger if they worked together.

“There were a bunch of small organizations like the Lebanon Fire Department, churches, and the Department of Human Services doing their own thing,” McCoy said. “The county was growing, so they decided to develop a nonprofit to manage it all and called it Wilson County Christmas for All.”

The organization marked its 25th anniversary last year.

Today, the nonprofit serves a remarkable number of families each year. In one recent year, volunteers helped around 2,500 children from roughly 1,200 families. Even in years when demand dips slightly, the need is still significant.

“This last year we helped about 2,300 children from around 1,100 families,” McCoy said.



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

The nonprofit has a 14-person board that helps set the direction, and so does the Lebanon Fire Department. “Their direction is crucial in making sure we achieve our goal every year,” McCoy said.

The Lebanon Fire Department also holds an annual golf tournament called the Spirit of Christmas Toy Drive. All donations from the golf tournament are given to Wilson County Christmas for All.

While toy distribution days often draw attention, much of the effort takes place months before the holidays arrive.

Volunteers transform unused office space inside the old Hartmann Luggage building into a massive toy distribution center. The building's owner allows the nonprofit to use the space for two months each year at no cost.

"That saves us a lot of money on space," she said.

The large warehouse becomes a hub for sorting, organizing, and packaging gifts. Donations from businesses, churches, and individuals fill tables with toys that are eventually assembled into bags for children.

But coordinating the entire operation is no small task.

"I do all the sponsor letters, the thank-you letters, and coordinate the volunteers and the drop-offs," McCoy said. "Right now, that's all me."

Last year alone, about 300 volunteers helped pack and distribute toys, and not a single person was paid.

Businesses often send employees to volunteer together, turning the work into team-building events while helping children at the same time.

"They'll bring in groups of people to build the bags with the wish lists," McCoy said. "Before you know it, it's done."



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

The mission is personal to McCoy, and when she began volunteering in 2019, she never expected to take on such a central role. But her dedication grew quickly as she saw the difference the program makes for families.

“I love it,” she said.

Part of that passion comes from her own childhood experiences. “I had two younger brothers, and my mom favored them, and I always got [the short end of the stick] at Christmas,” McCoy said. “So I want to make sure these children, because their parents are having a rough time, don’t [go without] at Christmas.”

The nonprofit works hard to personalize each child’s gifts whenever possible. Parents can provide wish lists and preferences so volunteers can match toys to each child’s interests.

“Some kids want Legos, some want sports equipment, some want art supplies,” McCoy said. “We tailor it to the child.”

Over the years, McCoy has seen countless examples of how meaningful the program can be.

One story that stands out involved a middle school student who approached a school counselor after learning his family would not be celebrating Christmas.

The boy's grandmother had entered hospice care, and the family simply could not afford gifts.

Through the school, the counselor contacted Christmas for All. McCoy quickly coordinated a response.

"We put together bags for the two younger siblings, the eighth grader, and the 17-year-old," she said.

Volunteers even wrapped the gifts so the overwhelmed mother wouldn't have to worry about it.

When she arrived to pick them up, she was stunned.



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

"She thought she was picking up a couple of items," McCoy said. "When she showed up, we filled the back seat and passenger seat of her car with gifts, and she was in tears."

It's moments like these that make every hour of work worthwhile, she said. Christmas for All relies heavily on partnerships with local businesses and

volunteers.

Community members donate toys, sponsor children, or simply show up to help sort and organize the gifts.

The program also works hard to keep operational costs low so more money can go directly to helping families.

“By relying on volunteers and community support, it allows us to help more families,” McCoy said.

The organization has also expanded its outreach efforts, connecting families with additional resources, including local food banks and assistance programs.

“It’s amazing how many people don’t know what help is available,” McCoy said.

As the program continues to grow, McCoy hopes Christmas for All can reach every family in need.

“Our goal is to help every family that asks for help,” she said.

Even after decades of service, the nonprofit still surprises people who discover it for the first time.

And McCoy said seeing families drive away with bags full of gifts never gets old.

“That’s another family that’s going to have a really nice Christmas and a lot less stress,” she said. **GN**

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