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It is better to give than ...

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Wilson County Christmas for All was able to donate toys to approximately 2,300 children around the county this holiday season. Among the program's volunteers from the Lebanon Kiwanis Club are: (from left) Charlcie Finley, Veronica Ander. Wes Dugan, Susie James, Chelsea Nyce, Sean Dozier, T.O. Cragwall, Gayle Hibbert and Sarah Sharp.

Submitted

Wilson County Christmas for All was able to gift toys to approximately 2,300 children this holiday season with the help of the Lebanon Fire Department and other benefactors in the community.

The Lebanon Fire Department has been doing the Spirit of Christmas Toy Drive for so long that division chief Brian Fountain said that nobody knows when it began.

"It started many decades ago with people bringing in used toys," Fountain said. "The firemen would fix them and hand them out. It grew and grew, and some other organizations around town joined in, and eventually, Christmas for All was formed out of it. It's all grown from the community coming together to help out the youth."



The Lebanon Fire Department is Wilson County Christmas for All's biggest benefactor, and its annual toy drive works in conjunction with the organization to distribute toys around the community.

"Our toy drive and fundraising and if we have any burn-out victims around Christmas time, then they'll help us get them toys," Fountain said. "It goes to the same place to get the toys into the kid's hands."

This year, the Lebanon Fire Department was able to make a \$25,000 donation in addition to its toy donations. The department also volunteers annually, providing manpower required to transport the toys to the warehouse.

"When we're really getting to see the impact is when the parents come by to pick up the gifts for the kids," Fountain said. "You can see the smile on their face, where the parents are trying to keep it hidden from them. We'll load the car without letting the kids see what's going on. That's where you really get to see the impact."

Each year, Wilson County Christmas For All typically has a budget of approximately \$100,000 to distribute gifts around the community. The fire department's \$25,000 donation will help the organization get started on preparations for the 2023 holidays.

The organization serves the area of Wilson County west of Highway 109, and finds the people it helps through the Department of Human Services, Lebanon Special School District, Wilson County Schools, and social media.

"We don't have any qualifications other than the age qualification, which is 0 to 13 years old," Wilson County Christmas for All Director Rick Smith said. "Other than residency, we don't check income or anything like that, because you never know who's having a rough time. We just don't want the kids to suffer, so we make sure the kids get something no matter what shape the parents are in."

Craig Harris