

Students buy presents for children in need

The fourth annual Giving Tree project gathers gift donations in University residence halls

By Nicole Garton
Oregon Daily Emerald

Festive jazz music pervades the air as residents of Hamilton Complex, up to their elbows in ribbons and wrapping paper, bustle about like elves in a workshop.

Under their busy hands, more than 60 toys donated by students and staff members are wrapped, ribboned and added to a growing pile of presents that will be torn open by the hands of needy children this holiday.

"It's fun to buy presents for people even if you don't know who they are," says junior environmental studies major Lisa Low as she wraps a Dr. Seuss book. "It gets you in the holiday spirit."

The unwrapped gifts on the table range from baby equipment and Barbie Dolls to Legos and art supplies, with something for children of just about any age.

"It would be fun to see who they were going to. I would love to see the children's faces when they open them," says junior resident assistant Emily Bekken, one of several residence hall staff members in charge of the fourth annual Giving Tree program.

The program provides a chance for students to donate holiday gifts, which will be distributed to children by the Eugene social service agency Centro Latino Americano.

It began with a single tree, decorated with lights and set up in the

University Inn cafeteria. The branches were hung with tags, each containing a gift suggestion. Students could choose a tag from the tree and buy a gift.

"The first year, the response was amazing; students gave a lot of good gifts," says Carl Yeh, resident director for Riley Hall and initiator of the program. "It just took off from there, and we kept doing it."

Since then, the Giving Tree has grown to include three trees: one at the UI, one in Carson Hall and one in Hamilton Complex.

Everyone seems to agree that the project has been a success.

"It's been really fun. I was kind of surprised at the support," says sophomore Courtney Misslin, a resident assistant in Hamilton Complex. "The amount of gifts we're getting is overwhelming."

In Hamilton, the tags are disappearing from the tree almost as fast as Bekken can hang them.

"We've had to restock the tree with tags at least twice a week. People are at least taking the tags off the tree," she says. She estimates that about 150 tags have been removed from the tree, and about 60 gifts have been turned in.

While many of the gifts are given by individuals, some residence halls donate a portion of their funds to the Giving Tree. Bean Complex has voted to donate \$100 for both presents and gift wrap this year.

Last year, Hamilton Complex gave \$300 for the project, and Bean Complex donated \$200, Yeh says.

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