

# Marines conducting Christmas toy drive

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With Christmas less than two weeks away, organizers are working to make it a merrier one for children in the area.

To do this, the Royal Gorge Detachment of the Marine Corps League and the U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Office recently began its annual Toy Drive to collect numerous items to distribute to children prior to Christmas.

"The Detachment hooked up with the Marine Corps Recruiting Office ... for a nationwide Toy Drive," said Past Commandant Ron Bates. "We're doing it again this year."

One reason the local Marines participate in the drive is because all the toys stay in Fremont County to help struggling families.

But it's also a way to help families at this time of year.

It touches his heart when Bates hears stories of families who have lost their jobs and have no money to buy toys for their children this Christmas.

"Last year, we were real successful," Bates said. "We gave away 5,500 toys."

Sponsored by Sunflower Bank and Subway, drop-off points are at Walgreens, Alco, Sunflower Bank and Subway in Wal-Mart, Cañon City Elks Lodge, Wells Fargo Bank in Penrose and Jean's Restaurant in Florence.

Bates is pleased that the residents spent time talking to the Marines, who stood by the boxes last year.

"People love talking to the Marines," Bates said.

He said the Marines gave out toys to more than 450 children last year and expects there to be closer to 1,000 this time.

Last year, "each of the kids got to pick out three toys," he said. "Then we delivered to 148 families."

He said he especially remembered one of the children when he picked out his gifts.

The deadline to bring toys at any of the drop off points will be Dec. 23.

"All toys will go for needy families and kids in our community and surrounding areas," he said.

He noted the donations are tax deductible, because Royal Gorge Marine Corps Detachment is a 501c4 nonprofit organization.

Companies who would like to have boxes in their establishments for people to bring toys or to donate money are asked to call Bates at 429-4491.