

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Santa's helpers pay visit to Mason Park



KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

Ontario Bradley, 7, shows off the bicycle he received for the holidays as a resident of the Mason Park community.

Caravan brings holiday joy

Nearly 1,000 Akron children get bicycles, tricycles or gift boxes

By Bill Lilley
Beacon Journal staff writer

Temperatures hovering around 20 - with wind gusts up to 38 mph - didn't make a bicycle ride on Sunday afternoon very appealing.

In fact, most families in the Akron area were house-bound because of the unfriendly weather.

Families in the Mason Park area, however, braved the cold when they saw the caravan for the third annual *Elves & More's Bringing Hope to Children One Bike at a Time*.

The caravan included four police vehicles, a ladder truck, an ambulance, an Akron trolley car, a Springfield school bus loaded with volunteers, and three double-trailer rigs from

Con-Way Freight.

Kelly Kutz and her three children were among those who followed the caravan to the Mason Park Community Center after seeing it drive by. They were cold but not disappointed.

"This is unbelievable," said 7-year-old Emilee Evilsizer, Kutz's youngest daughter, who was so cold she was nearly in tears. "This is my first new bike ever, and I never thought I'd be getting a bike like this this Christmas.

"I really needed a new bike because my old one was too small for me because I've grown. And it's great because my

Please see **Caravan, B2**

Caravan

It takes three hours to distribute the gifts

Continued from Page B1

new bike has some of my favorite colors. I can't wait to ride it."

Kelly Kutz, however, had Emilee, a second-grader at Mason elementary, and her siblings - Katelyn, a fourth-grader at Mason, and Jeremy, a seventh-grader at Hyre Middle School - walk their bikes back to their Black Street home.

"Not only is it too cold to ride, the roads are too icy," Kelly Kutz said. "I know they're dying to ride their new bikes, but we don't want this wonderful event to turn into a disaster because of the weather."

Nearly 1,000 children took advantage of the event, in which 750 bicycles, 210 tricycles and 40 gift boxes - for infants less than a year old - were

given to children 17 and under in the Mason Park area. It took about three hours for volunteers to distribute the gifts.

"Our goal is for each child to leave here with a gift," said Tim House, the event's co-founder. "You don't know - it might be the highlight of their Christmas."

Co-founder Brian Miner, an architect with Hasenstab Architects in Akron, was pleased with the event.

"We are thrilled to be able to provide an early Christmas present to kids in Mason Park this year," Miner said. "The whole day went great."

Miner said the group was able to raise enough money to cover this year's expenses and give away 1,000 gifts, "even though it was a tough year for a lot of people in the area."

"We can relax a little now that it's over," Miner said. "I'm just glad Christmas is on a Thursday this year because it gives me three days to do my own Christmas shopping for my family."

Bill Lilley can be reached at 330-996-3811 or billiley@thebeaconjournal.com.



KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

Aaron Notestine of Columbus with the Free Hugs Campaign hugs Marsharee Watson, 17, of Akron, after she picks up her new bicycle at the Mason Park community center.