

Holiday Spirit

## Napa wine club members donate 500 toys to Butte County's fire victims

Rosemarie Kempton | December 12, 2018



Alpha Omega vintners Michelle and Robin Baggett with toys that their wine club members brought for the Butte County Toys for Tots.

Alpha Omega

People wanting to donate toys to children whose lives have been thrown into upheaval due to the Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise will now have a place to bring them.

Until this week, Kathy Lovelace, coordinator of the Marine Reserve Butte/Glenn County Toys for Tots, has been asking people to hold off on sending toys until she could find space for distributing them.

Initially, Lovelace said she thought Toys for Tots would be able to use an area in the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds in Chico when the fire trucks left, but she discovered “every space at the Chico fairgrounds” used by displaced people from Paradise and surrounding areas.

Now she’s carved out a space at Butte Community College where she has an office. In addition, college classrooms can be used over the holidays.

While the Camp Fire was still burning,

Lovelace was getting calls from “good-hearted people” throughout the Bay Area who wanted to brighten the holidays for affected children.

“There has been an amazing outpouring of love from people wanting to help by making donations to Toys for Tots,” Lovelace said.

She has found the calls from Napa and Sonoma county residents who experienced fires last year most touching.

“The first thing Napa and Sonoma county people say is ‘We know what they are going through,’” she said. “We’ve been there.”

Lovelace said that the first Toys for Tots donations calls from Napa County were from Alpha Omega Winery and from Jessel Gallery.

Both had made generous donations to Toys for Tots last year after the wine country fires.

Alpha Omega Winery delivered 500 unwrapped toys to the Butte County Toys for Tots Monday, Lovelace said. The toys, contributed by their wine club members, were collected Sunday at their holiday party.

***“Our wine club members brought hundreds and hundreds of toys,” Kelly E. Carter, Alpha Omega’s communications director, said. “Among the gifts were lots of stuffed animals, toy cars, dolls, bicycles, house slippers, socks, notebooks, a purse and even a curling iron.”***

***“We have incredible wine club members,” Carter said. “Earlier this year, they allowed us to make a \$100,000 donation for wildfire relief.”***

Jessel Gallery owner Jessel Miller, who was evacuated from her home and art gallery during last year’s October fires, is donating 1,000 of her Mustard series books, plus gift certificates that friends have been contributing to Toys for Tots as soon as she finds someone with a large truck or small cargo van to drive the 50 boxes of books to Chico.

Last year, Miller donated 1,000 books through Toys for Tots from the same series to families in Santa Rosa and Napa who lost everything in the 2017 fires.

“These beautiful children’s books are wonderful. Books are a very important part of the the mission statement for the Marine Reserve Toys for Tots program,” Lovelace said. “We try to always give books. Each child, regardless of age, will be receiving a stuffed animal and a book.”

As the author and illustrator of award-winning, read-aloud books for children and adults, Miller gives her books to good causes by donating a 1,000 or more books a year, depending upon needs.

“From my point of view, I feel that giving these books is about giving children hope for the future and supporting them in this time of need,” Miller said. “I believe that there is so much negativity and devastation surrounding our little ones and voices of love need to speak really loudly to drown out what I perceive as an overwhelmingly unstable time.”

Lovelace is hoping that people will donate things that will appeal to older children this year.

“We always get a lot of toys for the little guys, so it is the older kids we need donations for,” Lovelace said. “Blue Orange Games in the Bay Area donated a huge variety of board games for all ages. That helps.”

Because this year has been so unusual, Lovelace said that her Toys for Tots team will continue to donate toys to children long after the holiday season ends.

“We will distribute as long as there are things to distribute,” Lovelace said. “The people affected by the fire are going to be in their situation for a long time.”