

## HOLIDAY JOY

**Community collaborates for toy shop program****By Nancy Hastings 12/22/2012**

HILLSDALE — For some families, Christmas will be a little brighter this year thanks to community collaboration with the Hillsdale Salvation Army's Toy Shop program. Lt. Chris Clarke said the annual Toy Shop is something the Salvation Army has done many years, but this year various area agencies joined them in an effort to reach more families.

Among those involved in the collaboration were the Community Action Agency, Great Start Collaborative, Hillsdale County Community Foundation and various service organizations.

The event was held Thursday at the administration building next to Hillsdale High School, where 35 families at a time were assigned to come inside and shop for their children. These families were ones who had not been adopted by the Salvation Army's Adopt a Family program, Clarke said. They signed up ahead of time at either the Salvation Army or CAA.

"Today is the most exciting time for them to see all the toys and how it is set up," Clarke said. "We'll have some people crying because they are so appreciative." This year's program had tables set up specifically for boys and girls of certain ages with two rooms with extra toys to restock the supply throughout the day. The toy shop continued from 9 a.m. to noon on Friday. "There will be enough so the last person will get just as much as the first person," Clarke said.

Volunteers served as personal shopping assistants, directing those looking for gifts to the tables where they would find age- and gender appropriate presents. Clarke was impressed with the amount of toys distributed, adding that in addition to choosing toys for their children, parents were also able to pick a game or puzzle, a book, hats and gloves and a stuffed animal. Lt. April Clarke said each family additionally received a food basket as well as milk, cheese and butter from the Hillsdale County Dairy Promoters and other dairies and councils in the county. "This is what Santa feels like," April Clarke said, noting the abundance collected through the months of November and December.

A wrapping station in another room was made possible with a \$500 grant from the Community Foundation that purchased wrapping paper, cutters and tape for volunteers to do their jobs. Additionally, Nash Drugs donated six garbage bags of bows. Even a tote full of various sized batteries was available for toys in the wrapping room. While wrapping a toy, volunteer Janice Seely, who works with Early Head Start, said she was excited to participate. "I just love it when the community gets together to do something positive like this," Seely said.

Though it was her first time to volunteer with the Salvation Army's Toy Shop, Seely has worked with the State Police post for a similar event. Clarke said he would like to see even more who wish to partner for the event next year. "It would be nice to have just the one event rather than have duplication (by other community agencies)," he said. While helping shopper Thomas Long choose hats and mittens for his daughters, Great Start Coordinator Ginelle Skinner said the event was something she was glad to see so many involved in.

“Several businesses have been holding toy drives to help us collect toys,” Skinner said. “It’s a great community collaboration.” For Long, the event meant he was able to provide gifts for his four daughters ages 2, 4, 6 and 8. “This is a blessing,” Long said. “Without it, my kids wouldn’t have a Christmas.”



**Great Start Coordinator Ginnelle Skinner helps Thomas Long with gifts for his four daughters at the Salvation Army Toy Shop Thursday morning. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO**



**Families shopped at the Salvation Army Toy Shop held inside the Hillsdale Community School’s Administration Building Thursday morning. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO**