

# NEWS TIMES

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E-Edition

## Christmas program brings joy to south county families



PHOTOS BY SHELBY WOLFE/Newport News-Times | Photo 1: Arissa Mohni helps her mother, Raenette Mohni, the lead organizer of the South County Children's Christmas Program, gift-wrap a present in the workshop above South Lincoln Resources' warehouse in Waldport on Wednesday, Nov. 14. Photo 2: Raenette Mohni is seen preparing to wrap gifts in the warehouse workshop. Photo 3: David Ross, year-round volunteer and brother of Raenette Mohni, is seen in the workshop toy room.

By: Stephanie Blair - Updated: 1 week ago

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WALDPORT — Christmas elves are hard at work in the workshop above South Lincoln Resources' warehouse in Waldport, getting ready to bring the joy of Christmas to low-income families.

Raenette Mohni has been the lead organizer of the South County Children's Christmas Program for 15 years — her official title is head elf. But the program has been in existence for 35 years, collecting Christmas gifts, wrapping and distributing them to low-income and homeless families.

The first step in the process of making it a holly, jolly Christmas for the children of these families is for the parents to apply and give the program a sense of what would be best. The application is designed to get as much information about the children's sizes and interests as possible, so that all the gifts are a perfect fit. Another key part of the application process is confirming that the families applying are local. As part of South Lincoln Resources, the Christmas program subscribes to a philosophy of neighbors helping neighbors — concentrating efforts to make as much of a difference for local children as possible.

"As much as we'd love to be able to give something to every child that's visiting or grandchild," said Mohni. "The program is meant for the children that live here."

Once the application is received and confirmed, the elves go "shopping" in the workshop. They grab a basket and use their application to select appropriate gifts from the programs collected toys, clothes and games.

### **Keeping kids happy and warm**

"We try for something warm and something fun for every kid," said Mohni. "And the warm is generally an outfit: jeans and t-shirts. If we know we have homeless children, the warm (component) will probably include a sleeping bag or blankets or whatever we can do to help alleviate the circumstances."

As for the "something fun," there are two parts: one sedentary gift and one active gift. The sedentary gifts are given with the knowledge that it rains a lot on the central coast, so outdoor gifts aren't perfect year-round. However, because being active is important, children also receive something to get them "up and out" as Mohni explained. In addition, every family gets a game, to encourage spending time together. The elves make an effort to appeal to all ages within each family.

Once the children have been shopped for, the elves will wrap the gifts and set them grouped together, ready for pickup. The program gathered and prepared gifts for 182 children, with a total of 85 families in 2017.

### **Donations needed**

However, before all of the orders can be filled, some donations are needed. Mohni shops year-round for the program at various stores using cash donations, so that they can take advantage of the best deals. For example, winter coats go on sale in early spring, so that's when Mohni shops for those to make dollars stretch as far as possible. However, item donations from the community are still needed.

Gift lists for certain children — no names included — as well as requests for specific items can be found on the program's giving tag tree, which was placed at the Waldport Washington Federal Bank on Thursday. While Mohni is reluctant to put the giving tag tree up before Thanksgiving, she said that it's the only way that people have enough time to get the gifts in time — the presents left under that tree will be collected by the elves on Dec. 7 for wrapping and preparation for pickup.

Top wishlist items include hoodies and jeans — all sizes help — LEGOs, arts and crafts supplies, sport balls, makeup and nail polish, dolls, cars and trucks, DVDs and board games — especially games for older kids. But some of the most requested things of every kid's list are items associated with current popular movies, shows or games.

For more information about South Lincoln Resources and the South County Children's Christmas Program, visit [www.southlincolnresources.org](http://www.southlincolnresources.org) or call 541-563-3710.

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