



Families Given Free, Furnished Homes

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Dec. 25 - KGO (KGO) -- Home for the holidays -- it's a sentiment most of us take for granted. But this Christmas, it will be very much a reality for two homeless fathers and their sons. Both are getting free apartments -- apartments that have benefited from a little professional sprucing up.

It is unloading day at an apartment building near Union Square. Mattresses are being unwrapped. Bunk beds are assembled. Appliances are unboxed. Curtains are hung with care. It is a flurry of activity for a special holiday gift.

Only these works aren't done by Santa's elves -- these are Sophie's elves.

Sophie Azouaou, Sophisticate Interiors: "I just wanted to do something. I wanted to make a difference for the holidays. When Benefit called and said two units would be available, 'Would you help?' I jumped."

Sophie Azouaou is playing Mrs. Clause this holiday season. The upscale interior designer -- who normally caters to clients with no budget -- is donating her time, money, and resources to help two homeless dads and their sons with the help of donations decking the walls, and transforming these studios into cozy sanctuaries they can call home.

Sophie Azouaou, Sophisticate Interiors: "Not a hotel room, not a unit. We tried to get linens, we wanted them to have clothes, we wanted them to have everything to have a real Christmas."

A Christmas wish made possible by Tim Gaskin and Dorian Adams, cofounders of Benefit magazine, a new Bay Area lifestyle publication solely dedicated to philanthropy. The duo came upon an idea when they went on a sales call.

Tim Gaskin, Benefit magazine: "When we met with Citi Apartments for advertising, we found that some of their 5,000 units go un-rented. We came up with a model to get homeless families, at-risk youth, and families into these empty apartments."

The result were two apartments donated for just a dollar a year each.

Nick Sideris, Citiapartments: "We wanted to build a program where we could give back to the community, and create a model so that others can get involved and give what they can give."

It's a donation that means a new place for Johnny to sleep. The three-year-old and his father have been staying at the Raphael House, a San Francisco shelter dedicated to helping homeless families.

John Fosmire, getting apartment: "I love this place. They help me, and everyone loves my kid."

Abandoned by his wife last Easter, John Fosmire has spent the last two months getting his life back on track. So the Raphael House decided the single dad was ready to make the move.

Terri Dimartini, Raphael House: "Having families stay in apartments where they can save money for the length of time enables them to buy their own home. Its a dream come true."

A "designer" dream, complete with matching bed linens and towels, a kitchenette stocked with goodies, dressers, TV's, a closet full of clothes, and a tree trimmed with toys.

And all of it just waiting for the moment when the family would arrive. For this once-homeless father and son, the pursuit of happiness begins with heartfelt gratitude.

John Fosmire, getting apartment: "Thank you so much. God bless you."

John's final Christmas wish is a job. Citi Apartments is planning to donate more units, which go for over \$800-dollars a month. It's hoping other landlords will do the same.

The goal for Benefit magazine is to get 60 units donated over the next three years.

Businesses and individuals that donated:

From The San Francisco Mart:

- * Ochi and Company
- * New Century Pix
- * Wanda Spangenberg
- * Capel rugs
- * Alchemy
- * Down Ect.
- * G&C Trucking Company
- * Mattress Discounters (30 percent discount)
- * Dr. Calandri DDs (dental care products)
- * Dr. Kristin Walker M.D. bath and facial products)
- * Gail Soares (T.V.'s)
- * Adrienne Alexander (toys and clothes)
- * Cathy Paterson (toys)
- * Ruthie Flores (holiday decorations, toys)
- * John & Elaine Karnay
- * Krys and Malena Bankerwich
- * J.B. Lorda
- * Oberto and Dania Alvarez

SophiSticate Interiors:

- * Bunk beds
- * Dressers & nightstands
- * Appliances
- * Bed and bath linens
- * Window coverings
- * Kitchen accessories
- * Clothing

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