

Local businesses bring holiday cheer

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For many firms, the holidays represent a time of one extreme or another: either super-busy in the retail sector or slow in some office environments. But regardless of whether they had time to kill or shoppers to serve, businesses throughout San Francisco and the Peninsula donated good works this holiday season.

That puts the participants on the good side of a less positive year in holiday giving. Charitable giving and volunteer activities were on the 2006 agenda of 66 percent of companies participating in a survey conducted by The Bureau of National Affairs Inc., a Washington, D.C., research firm. The figure, drawn from Web interviews of 214 companies, is down from 72 percent in 2005 and 69 percent from 2004.

The type of giving varies. Tony Bayudan of Spectrum Federal Credit Union in San Francisco said his business did what many firms do — it participated in the San Francisco Fire Department's holiday toy drive. But Spectrum also held a toy drive at the Mission Neighborhood Health Center, and held a holiday party for the children and staff members at the Sunset Youth Center, where the company also holds financial education seminars.

The credit union enjoys making a difference in the community, and it's also good for morale, Bayudan said.

"Since it is the holidays, we tend to stop hanging out with co-workers, so it helps us to come together," he said, adding that staff members bring their partners and children to volunteer events. "It pretty much brings out everyone and they want to do something."

While his firm worked on broad initiatives, entrepreneurs Leslie Drapkin and Eleanor Carpenter of Jest Jewels on Union Street made a difference for one girl.

Liliana Rico, 15, of Daly City, is a recovering cancer patient at UCSF Medical Center. She said she adored her present: a tall Christmas tree bedecked with pink marabou feathers and Hello Kitty ornaments.

"It's really nice. I love pink. It's one of my favorite colors," Rico said. "I [also] got a sweater, a pink sweater, with Hello Kitty on it. I like it."

Jest Jewels created the tree as part of Union Street's Fantasy of Lights promotion, in partnership with the nonprofit organization The Guardsmen and Steven Restivo Event Services LLC. More than a dozen other Union Street businesses also decorated special trees, which went to Glide Memorial Church and other charitable groups.

"We were going to give it to a hospital, but from the hospital they said that there's a very special young girl and her family. So, we decided to go direct," Drapkin said.



Tony Bayudan of Spectrum Federal Credit Union, second from right, helps kids at Sunset Youth Center decorate sugar cookies during a party the firm sponsored as part of its holiday community outreach.

John Fosmire, a single father who was homeless and looking for work while caring for his 3-year-old son, received a rather large and hard-to-wrap present: a studio apartment with \$1-a-year rent courtesy of Citi-

Apartments/Skyline Realty, and decorated by Sophie Azouaou of SophiSticate Interiors.

It was one of two efficiency studios donated as part of a pilot program between the San Francisco landlord firm, homeless shelter Raphael House and Benefit magazine. The program pairs hard-to-rent units with pre-screened families, Benefit Editor-in-Chief Tim

Gaskin said.

"It's a little studio. It's nice, it's really nice," Fosmire said. "When I first walked in there, I felt like I needed to dress up to come in to my own house. It's opening doors for me. Now I can save money and maybe buy a house."

He hopes to obtain work as a window-washer or janitor, now that he has also obtained child care for his son. The studio is conveniently close to Raphael House, so the small family can return for daily dinners and youth evening activities, the charity's director of children and family services Terri DiMartini said.

While the personal stories tug at the heartstrings, businesses also gave to nonprofit organizations directly.

Bruce Goff of Domus Design Group, for example, estimates that he's given some 25 to 30 offices' and 20 conference rooms' worth of furniture to nonprofits. They're castoffs from his interior design clients, but Goff does the work and neither his firm nor the donor gets a tax write-off.

"It improved our office workspace tremendously," said World Arts West Executive Director Julie Mushet, whose organization received office furniture from Goff in coordination with an office move.

Goff said he keeps a list of what's needed by various organizations, and tries to match them with companies with excess furniture.

"The hardest thing is finding out who wants it. It's kind of like being a matchmaker," Goff said.

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