



Pines campus collects toys for military families

By Chris Guanche, Forum Publishing Group
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Toys collected at Keiser University's Pembroke Pines campus are part of a larger drive to distribute Christmas presents to children in military families.

The toy drive, which recently concluded, was conducted in coordination with Operation Homefront, a Texas-based nonprofit with chapters that assist military families. That assistance can take the form of financial aid, transportation and home and car repair. In 2012, Operation Homefront chapters across Florida collected about \$300,000 worth of toys, said Simone Hoover, executive director for the Southeast region, which includes Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

About 30 percent of the toys collected in the state were distributed in South Florida, Hoover said. Toys are given to families through distribution events or pickups by volunteers. The toys run the gamut for younger kids, but Hoover said cash is preferred when it comes to teens.

"Older kids are hard to provide for," she said. "It's a challenge, so we use the cash to buy them gift cards."

The Homefront toy drive isn't the first time that Keiser's Pembroke Pines campus has participated. Statewide, Keiser locations have raised about \$15,000 for the effort, said Cecil Kidd, president of the Pines campus.

"We make it an annual event," Kidd said.

The toys that came in varied from race cars to Barbie dolls.

"We try to make sure we have a diversity of toys for boys and girls," Kidd said.

Kidd said the campus' military connection is visible on campus, where about 20 percent of the student body is veterans. Student veterans have also set up their own association on campus.

Operation Homefront also is organizing related events, like holiday meals for families. Although the toy drive is over, Hoover said donations are still being accepted to assist military families in other ways.

For more information, call 888-390-0843 or visit <http://www.operationhomefront.net>.
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