

Keiser Students, Staff Assist Veterans' Children

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Ava Rodgers, 10, and Olivia Bryant, 9, apply a guitar "tattoo" during the kickoff this month for the toy drive at Keiser University in Lakeland.

LAKELAND | As part of its ongoing effort to show support to veterans, students and faculty at the Lakeland campus of Keiser University collected Christmas toys for veterans' children and entertained them at an event.

Campus President Rebecca McDonnell said this was the second holiday season that students and faculty joined forces to collect toys for children of military families.

It's a great cause for the school for many reasons, she said, particularly because about one-fifth of its students are active military, veterans or family members of military personnel.

The toy drive was organized with Operation Homefront, a national nonprofit group formed after 9/11 to help support families of deployed service members

Children of students and faculty members, along with some local veteran groups, were invited to the campus for a holiday event Dec. 4. There was a visit from Santa Claus, a local chain restaurant cooked and served waffles, and other refreshments were served.

Based in San Antonio, Operation Homefront targets American military personnel and/or their families who have needs because of financial hardship, death, injury or physical or mental detriment as a result of serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Keiser, a private, not-for-profit university, has about 20,000 students on 17 campus sites, along with international programs.

Employee Ryan Reis said the school faculty and students historically have appreciated the opportunity to participate in programs that help military personnel and their families — including those who have retired.

"There is strong support for veterans at Keiser," he said. We are happy to have the opportunity to help."

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