

# San Diego Union-Tribune

## PACE Seniors Get Their Gifts

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

By Michael Stetz

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*Alice Boctor, 80, laughs and sings with a fellow participant at the St. Paul's PACE program for senior Wednesday, where volunteers and staff threw a holiday party for participants of the program.*

Photo: Peggy Peatti

Dan Siminoski scored. He got four movie tickets and a \$20 gift card to a multiplex for Christmas. And what else goes better with movies than popcorn? Well, he got that, too.

The 62-year-old had only asked for a single movie ticket. He thought that would be more than enough for him.

But some serious Christmas magic has hit the St. Paul's PACE program, in which he's enrolled.

The senior citizens it serves had been asked earlier what they wanted for Christmas and they responded with the most meager of requests, such as shampoo, soap, a razor...

One asked for a pillow. Another, white socks. Still another, boxer shorts.

One senior hoped for a mop and a bucket.

It touched hearts. Donations poured in. And the seniors, some of whom receive no other gifts this Christmas season, enjoyed the bounty Wednesday at a Christmas party at the PACE center in Bankers Hill.

"I'd rather go to a movie than go to Hawaii," said Siminoski, who's disabled and has no family in the San Diego area. This is the only Christmas gift he'll get this year.

"I'm very grateful."

PACE stands for Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly. It offers a wide range of daily services, such as meals, physical therapy and health care, so frail seniors can live independently in their own homes.

Program executives know that Christmas can be a tough time for their clients, which number nearly 140.

"They truly look at us as family," said Carol Hubbard, the executive director. "Chances are many of them will be alone in their apartments on Christmas."

The seniors were overjoyed with the gifts. They carefully unwrapped them, smiling. They wore festive hats. They sang Christmas songs. Margaret Murphy, 74, received a house coat, just as she asked.

Her husband, Jack, passed away last year, she said. They would have been married 44 years. This would be her only Christmas present, too.

Why the house coat?

"It's something I needed," she said.

Wednesday's presents were all supplied by the Pima Medical Institute in Chula Vista, which learned of the seniors' plight from a newscast. PACE simply didn't have the

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money to get all the gifts on the seniors' wish list this year, given the growing program.

The Pima faculty decided to forgo its gift exchange and use that money to buy the seniors their presents. Students also chipped in by holding fund-raisers. The school raised \$2,000 in all. Students and faculty were on hand Wednesday, handing out the gifts.

The San Diego Union-Tribune published a story about the seniors on Thanksgiving and that caused an additional crush of community support. PACE received more than 100 emails from people asking how they could help. Two rooms upstairs are being used to house all the gifts that came pouring in.

One company donated 200 shoes. Other people gave candy, clothing, toiletries. The seniors will be getting additional gifts throughout the holiday season because of the outpouring, PACE officials said.

It's needed. Many of the seniors are on fixed incomes and even basic, everyday items are welcome.

It's why they asked for such simple Christmas gifts, they said.

Ruth Harris, 81, got a \$25 gift card, which she'll use for some sort of necessity. Maybe shoes, she said.

"I don't need anything elaborate."

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