



December 20, 2016

Navy shares holiday cheer with local Head Start students



Volunteers from across the Lakehurst side of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J. donated and delivered more than 230 gifts to local Head Start students as part of the 41st annual Navy Lakehurst Giving Tree Program. (Photo courtesy of O.C.E.A.N., Inc. Head Start)

JOINT BASE MCGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHURST, N.J. – For the 41st year, Navy civilians and Sailors from the Lakehurst side of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst came together to donate toys for local disadvantaged youth as part of the Navy Lakehurst Giving Tree Program.

More than 230 students from Toms River, Manchester and Berkeley Head Start programs received a requested toy from their holiday wish list, donated by volunteers from the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division Lakehurst and the Naval Support Activity.

“Every year, I am grateful for the generosity of the Navy Lakehurst community. We were able to deliver over 230 gifts this year, which is no small task,” said Maria Legato, NAWCAD Lakehurst employee who volunteers as one of the Giving Tree Program coordinators. “Many of the children that benefit from this program do not have the best home lives, and the visit from Santa may bring the only toy they will receive this year.”

Santa, his elves and his Sailor friends visited the Head Start schools the week of Dec. 13 to deliver the gifts.



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“The excitement in the room when the children unwrap their gifts (all at the same time, Santa’s rule) brings joy not only to the children, but also to the volunteers. Some children would walk around and tell everyone they could about their gift, then run over to Santa to give him a hug and say thank you,” said Legato.

Along with opening their presents, the children posed for photos with Santa, which teachers said will be shown to their families.

“O.C.E.A.N., Inc. Head Start and the Lakehurst Giving Tree Program have had a long and successful relationship for over 25 years. Too often, in low income families, funds need to go towards day to day living expenses rather than gifts for the holiday. The generosity of the Lakehurst Giving Tree Program has benefited our families by providing gifts which have helped our families have a brighter Christmas,” said Sharon Hopson, O.C.E.A.N., Inc. Head Start Education Coordinator.