



December 22, 2018

Photos courtesy of Community Outreach Ministry

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Children of Incarcerated Parents Celebrated the Holidays at Eighteenth Annual Angel Tree Party

Annual Community Outreach Ministry Party provided 200 local children with gifts on behalf of their incarcerated parents

The 18th annual Angel Tree Christmas party hosted by Dr. Mona and Bob Davies of Community Outreach Ministry was a royal celebration. In partnership with Angel Tree® a program of Prison Fellowship, the event, held December 16 at Elks Lodge #2591 in Wildomar, serves each year as a way for incarcerated parents to ensure that their children celebrate the holidays as all children should: in a cheerful, social setting replete with song, food and gifts under a big tree. Referrals for the annual party come from the parents of these children as well as area schools and churches.

The annual event began with a spectacular performance by The Temecula Valley Young Marines (TVYM) who performed *Colors*, followed by *The Pledge of Allegiance* and the *National Anthem*. In other events at the party that was held both indoors and outside through a series of booths, Wildland Firefighter Kevin Ferris gave the children a tour of the U.S. Department of Forestry firetruck from Murrieta. "Smokey the Bear" and other firefighters gave tours of the fire equipment. California Highway Patrol officer Javier Muniz of Temecula who was assisted by volunteers found a fun way to further educate the little partygoers about safety materials. Children learned significant tips such as the importance of wearing helmets while riding their bicycles and to always use seat belts when travelling in cars.

The Vista Community Clinic of Lake Elsinore brought its state-of-the-art mobile dental clinic to the party so that both the children and any extended family members participating at the event could receive free dental assessments. Jonay Cordeiro, manager of Wells Fargo on Central Avenue in Lake Elsinore and fellow bank team members ingeniously engaged the youth in a creative version of the game "Jenga" as a way to build the children's understanding of financial literacy.

Other outdoor booths showcased Cynthia Duran of Sewing and Craft Stories assisting children to send Christmas cards to their parents. Temecula Valley Charter School Math Teacher Carly Paulsen a middle school instructor brought together her unique team of volunteers to create snowflakes with the youth. At her booth, Debbie Cortez of Purses from Heaven of Lake

Elsinore stuffed purses with Bibles and toiletry gifts that she distributed to the caregivers of some of the children who were also present at the event. Jordyn Kojis of Cal Lutheran High School in Wildomar and her team engaged in face painting the children at their booth.

Lunch was catered by New Life Culinary Creations and served by Denise Ronzello, TVYM and Wells Fargo. Dalia Smith of Murrieta donated 200 delicious and beautifully decorated Christmas cupcakes. Enchanting Christmas carols were sung by the Mt. View Church youth group of Wildomar. The singers, who ranged in age from four to 12 sang "Go Tell It on the Mountain," "Joy to the World" and gave a recital of "The Christmas Story" with program leader Dena Piraino. The amazing and talented Lake Elsinore Neal Brothers Jacori and Jaelin sang the "National Anthem," "Feliz Navidad" and "Hallelujah."

Among the 200 children receiving gifts were the Paloma sisters Kloe, age five and Julisa, age 17 of Hemet. Julisa shared her story about how she has received Angel Tree gifts from her dad since age four. For more than a decade, she has been a part of Community Outreach Ministry's annual Angel Tree Christmas party and camping. She said the parties have been "real fun" and her presents have included warm jackets and other gifts that always "bring a smile" to her face. Her younger sister Kloe also likes her presents.

Gift sponsors for the children were as follows: Kids and Family Foundation of Riverside, Wells Fargo Inland Crossroads District, Nike Factory Store-Lake Elsinore, Denise Ronzello and gals from Shear Expressions Salon of Wildomar, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, Southland Arthritis and Rheumatology, Menifee Valley Curves for Women; Massage Envy-Murrieta, Wildomar and Menifee, Wellness and More-Murrieta. Additional gift sponsors included Infiniti Boutique-Temecula, Dr. Jeff Prais Dental Office-Murrieta, Yolanda Burgess Bookkeeping-Murrieta and Francisco's Towing-Menifee.

Of the 200 children adopted, 53 percent were girls and 47 percent were boys. Fourteen percent of the children were within the zero to four age range, 35 percent were between five to ten years in age, 20 percent of the little partygoers were 11 to 13 and 31 percent of the youth were between 14 and 18. The children's ethnicities were Hispanic at 47 percent, Caucasian at 32 percent, African American at 20 percent and Pacific Islander at one percent. The children were from the following cities: Wildomar (25 percent), Murrieta (24 percent), Hemet (23 percent), Lake Elsinore (19 percent) and Temecula (nine percent).

We are grateful to Janice Hare of Mt. View Church for obtaining the children's wish lists, Johnna Hose of Destinations Explored by Dream Vacations of Murrieta for writing the Angel Tree tags, Yolanda Burgess for handling operations, Marcella Martinez of Wildomar for shopping and wrapping and Marilyn and Lionel Brown-Lake Elsinore for picking up and bagging gifts. We are also appreciative to Jimmy Hsieh of Temecula Sunrise Rotary and TVYM for distributing the gifts, Alice Li of Murrieta Valley High School who served as the event photographer and to Ed Aguirre Production Video of Temecula, Elks Lodge #2591 Al and Maryann Kuk and Deborah Bessie. Thank you all for the greatest Christmas Party ever and *"helping to break the cycle of incarceration giving kids a second chance to be winners and champions."*



Wells Fargo Inland Crossroads District



Gil Burgess of Burgess Bookkeeping



Temecula Valley Young Marines enjoying lunch after serving royal guests



Norma Maya, Kloe and Julisa Paloma of Hemet



Southland Arthritis Rheumatology



Nike Team with Yoval children Sebastian, Katrina and Esther of Lake Elsinore



Sessions Family of Hemet



Ochoa Family of Murrieta