

There are 216 children from 156 Wheeling families who hope to have something under the tree this Christmas, according to Salvation Army Maj. John Blevins.

"I'm sure we'll have more than that," Blevins added.

In order to assist in fulfilling those needs, Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack has been collecting gifts since Dec. 1 and will continue until Dec. 23 for its third

annual Wheeling Island Christmas Wish toy drive.

According to Wheeling Island Director of Marketing Kim Florence, drives from the previous two years resulted in items for more than 100 of the gift bags needed and helped the Salvation Army to meet its goal.

The giant red and green donation box at the casino floor entrance was already filled once and emptied, said Florence. The assortment of gifts span from board games to clothes to bicycles. The donations are provided mostly by casino guests, and those who put in an item receive a \$10 Free Play voucher in exchange as part of the promotion. Florence said employees also have been known to make donations.

When Blevins collects the donations, the Salvation Army will sort the items to cater to children's needs, including clothing sizes and gender preference.

"Christmas is a special time of year when a child's thoughts become wishes and dreams," said Jim Simms, president and general manager of the Island facility. "Sadly, hundreds of children in our area wake up to unfulfilled wishes, with no gifts to open and no family dinner to celebrate the holiday we cherish so much. I want to see us help give a kid a Christmas."

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Written by Administrator

Friday, 10 December 2010 23:11 -

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