

# Handmade holidays



A table full of handmade toys at the Apple County Woodcrafters annual Toy Giveaway and Holiday Party on Wednesday. This year, the nonprofit gave away over 2500 toys to groups like The Salvation Army to distribute to families in need during the holiday season. CHRISTIAN SMITH/CITIZEN TIMES

## Local woodworking nonprofit donates thousands of toys

### Christian Smith

Hendersonville Times-News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

HENDERSONVILLE - Between the card tables filled to the edge with handmade wooden toys, woodcrafters and nonprofit employees in holiday dress and even a surprise visit from Santa Claus, the Elks Club in Hendersonville on Dec. 7 felt like a certain North Pole locale kids dream about.

The Apple County Woodcrafters, a nonprofit woodworking club in Hendersonville, may have been holding its annual Toy Giveaway and Holiday Party,

but it felt more like Santa's Workshop. This year, the Woodcrafters distributed over 2,500 handmade toys, mostly wooden toys like trucks and puzzles but also some stuffed animals and quilts, to 12 local nonprofit and other groups that will distribute them to kids who may not otherwise get toys during the holiday season.

"I just want to, on behalf of the community as a whole, say thank you again this year to this wonderful, wonderful toy distribution," Hendersonville Mayor Barbara Volk said at the giveaway. "I'm overwhelmed again. I think there is more than there have been in the past

and some interesting new items as well."

The 12 groups all represent different ways of helping struggling people, from food banks to crisis centers and everything in between. The groups are:

- Calvary Food Pantry
- Carolina Baptist Association
- Children and Family Resource Center
- Craggy and Swannanoa Correctional Centers
- Edneyville Community Lion's Club

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# Toys

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- Eliada Homes
- Fishes and Loaves Food Pantry
- Helping Hand Development Center
- Hendersonville Rescue Mission
- St. John in the Wilderness
- The Salvation Army of Henderson, Polk, and Transylvania Counties
- The Storehouse

St. John in the Wilderness and the Carolina Baptist Association picked their toys up early because they had holiday events before the giveaway, Apple County Woodcrafters Vice President Gary Mach said.

From each of the ten groups at the event, a leader in the organization spoke about how grateful they were to be distributing the toys and the impact the toys have on the lives of the kids who receive them.

"I didn't realize where these toys came from," said Chris Pace, who said he has been involved with The Storehouse for over ten years. "I'd be over there in distribution, and all these neat toys were around, and I really started believing Santa was real. That there were legitimate elves bringing toys here because I'm saying, 'These did not come from Walmart. These are special.'"

Apple County Woodcrafters has been

holding these toy giveaways for 37 years, and according to Marketing Director Don Speese, holiday toy giveaways is where the organization began. At first, he said, it started with just a few guys making toys in their garages.

Now the nonprofit spends over \$5,000 a year just on materials for these toys.

After getting all the materials and planning out the toys, Speese said the organization "then assigns work to the elves, sorry, to the woodworkers." The group currently has around 250 members, all of whom pay \$100 a year dues to be in the club. Membership comes with access to its 3,750 square foot shop and resource library in Hendersonville, monthly meetings, field trips and workshops.

"Since 1995, our members have made over 25,000 wooden toys, for local deserving children at Christmas," the Apple County Woodcrafters website says.

In addition to wooden toys, other members made over 250 stuffed bears and quilts for the giveaway.

Work on next year's toys will begin soon, Mach said.

*Christian Smith is a reporter for the USA Today Network. Questions or Comments? Contact him at [RCSmith@gannett.com](mailto:RCSmith@gannett.com) or (828) 274-2222*



Seen here at Apple County Woodcrafter's annual Toy Giveaway and Holiday Party on Wednesday, from left: Gary Mach, vice president of Apple County Woodcrafters; Wendy Hamil, donor services manager for the Community Foundation of Henderson County and Don Speese, marketing director of Apple County Woodcrafters. The Community Foundation handles Apple County Woodcrafters' finances, Mach said, and also regularly provides grants for projects like its annual holiday toy giveaway. CHRISTIAN SMITH/CITIZEN TIMES