

Residents play Santa via charities

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There is also your office's Secret Santa, where for around \$20 you are more than likely to get a silly gadget that in reality neither you nor your Secret Santa knows what it does.

Eight years ago, staff at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library decided to end their Secret Santa gift exchange and instead donate that money to a local elementary school's library.

Schools are chosen by drawing a name out of a hat, according to Carolyn Nordheimer James, the library's CEO.

"It's like kindred spirits, one library to another," she said.

Donations have ranged from \$250 to \$500 annually.

Like the library staff, Stouffville's Moller Insurance has opted to forgo the staff gift exchange and donate to The Sun-Tribune/York Region Media Group's Santa Fund.

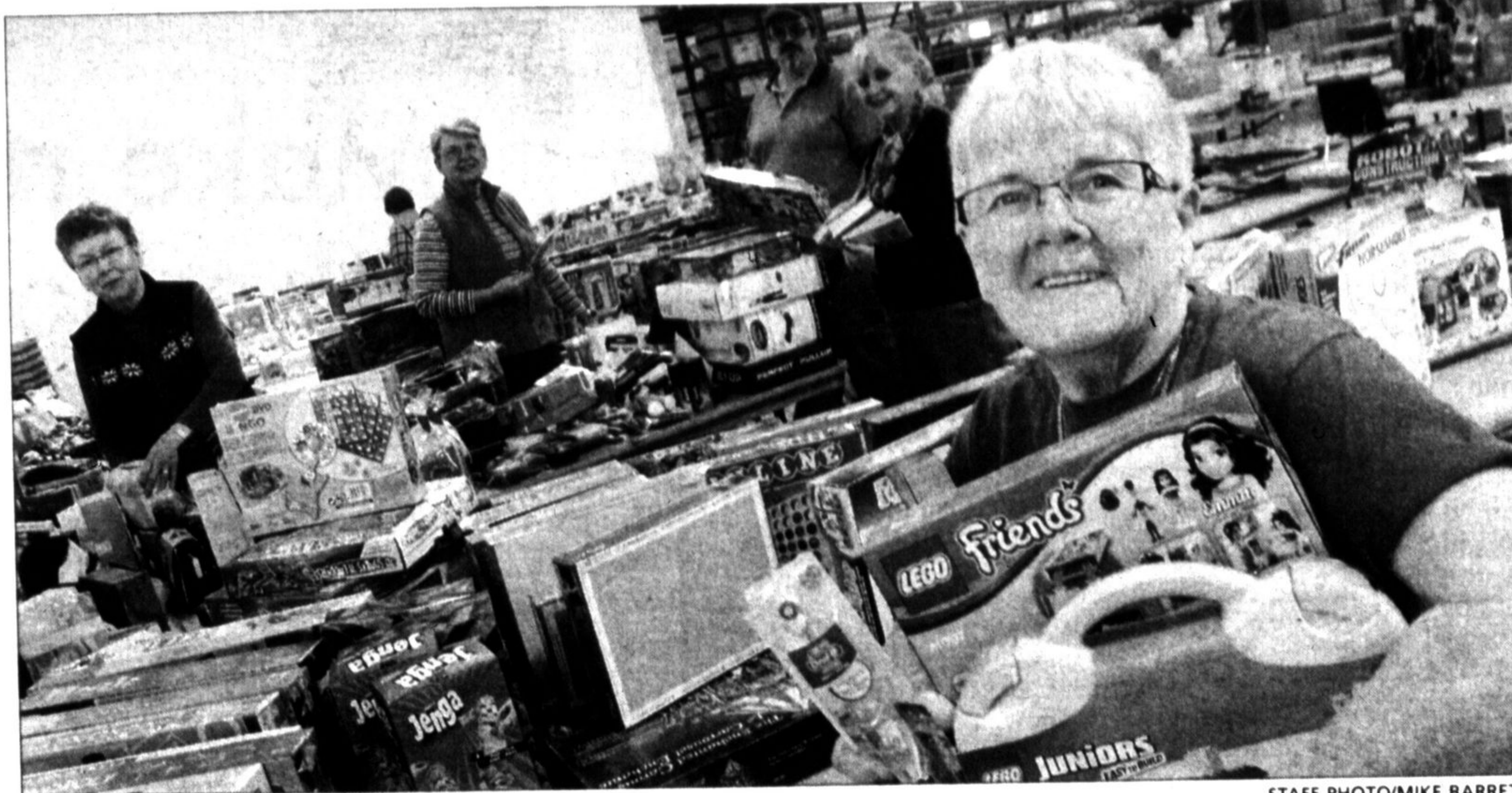
The 11-person office provided Christmas gifts for two families this year. Because there is a need, it's not uncommon for staff to donate \$50 or more, instead of the traditional \$20, said Jeannie Dinatale, an insurance broker at the company.

"For the small business, they support your business, the least you can do is give back," she said. "There is a need out there and we can fulfill it."

A York Region dental office has opted to donate what they would have spent on sending Christmas cards to their clients, to the United Way this year, according to Carmen Clayton, associate director of corporate partnerships for United Way York Region.

Many ways to help locally

The OSPCA has been running Paws to Give for about 10 years.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Pat Houston (right) was one of the many volunteers, town staff and members of the Stouffville Lions Club assembling 60 holiday hampers at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Municipal Offices Tuesday.

Gift-givers select from a variety of items such as care for a cat/kitten (\$30), dog (\$50) or horse (\$100), each of which consists of loving care, nutritious food, bedding, toys and required veterinary care.

People can also choose a gift of greatest need, which helps shelter animals in desperate need of care.

People have been responding well to the program because donors know exactly where their money is going, according to Kallie Milleman, community development assistant with the Whitchurch-Stouffville-based animal shelter.

Three years ago, they added limited edition plush toys to their offerings. This year there is Madison the yellow lab, Rocky the lab/great dane and Tyson, a hound.

They are all based on dogs that have come through the shelter.

Each toy is \$40 and comes with a personalized adoption certificate.

The plush dog can be sent directly to the donor or someone else.

People not only donate out of the kindness of their hearts, but also in memory of a lost pet.

During the holidays, the OSPCA sees an increase in donations by about 20 to 30 per cent, according to Milleman.

CBM Canada, which is a Stouffville-based Christian development organization committed to improving quality of life for persons with disabilities in the poorest countries of the world, also has an online Hope and Healing catalogue.

For a \$100 donation, a family receives training, tools and start up capital for their own vegetable farm, while \$140 provides a family with two goats.

Lions, food bank deliver

Not everyone has a lot of money to spare for Christmas gifts, let alone donations to organizations. In fact, 12.7 per cent of York Region's 1.1 million residents live in poverty, including 14.8 per cent of its youth.

The Stouffville Lions put together about 60 baskets with toys, clothes and food vouchers for families, while the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank is expected to hand out about 100 baskets to its clients this year.

For about four years, the Stouffville Kinsmen Club has been donating to the Santa Fund and before that, they donated to the Children's Aid Society at Christmas.

The donations being more than

10 years ago with its Kinettes, the female arm of the Kinsmen. The women decided it was just something they wanted to do, according to Bruce Gribbon, past-president of the Stouffville Kinsman Club.

The women would get together on a Friday night and shop. They would then re-group another night and wrap everything, he said.

Although the Stouffville Kinettes no longer exist, there are four women who keep the tradition alive, he said, noting they keep the shopping local — they go to Giant Tiger.

For the second year in a row, players with the Stouffville Minor Hockey Association have brought new toys to the arena and given them directly to Santa, who in turn distributes them through his elves with the Santa Fund.

Give gift of time

There is one thing people can give that does not cost a dime — time.

The gift of time can be as simple as providing a free night of babysitting for a friend, helping an elderly neighbour with chores, assisting someone with a house-

hold project/renovation or fixing their car.

When it comes to people you know, you can offer up your assistance with a gift certificate made on your computer or just show up and lend a hand.

You can also give the gift of time more formally by volunteering.

There are about 250 organizations looking for volunteers in York Region, according to Rosemary Park, chairperson of the York Region Community Information and Volunteer Centre, which is a website that connects organizations with volunteers: <http://york.cioc.ca>

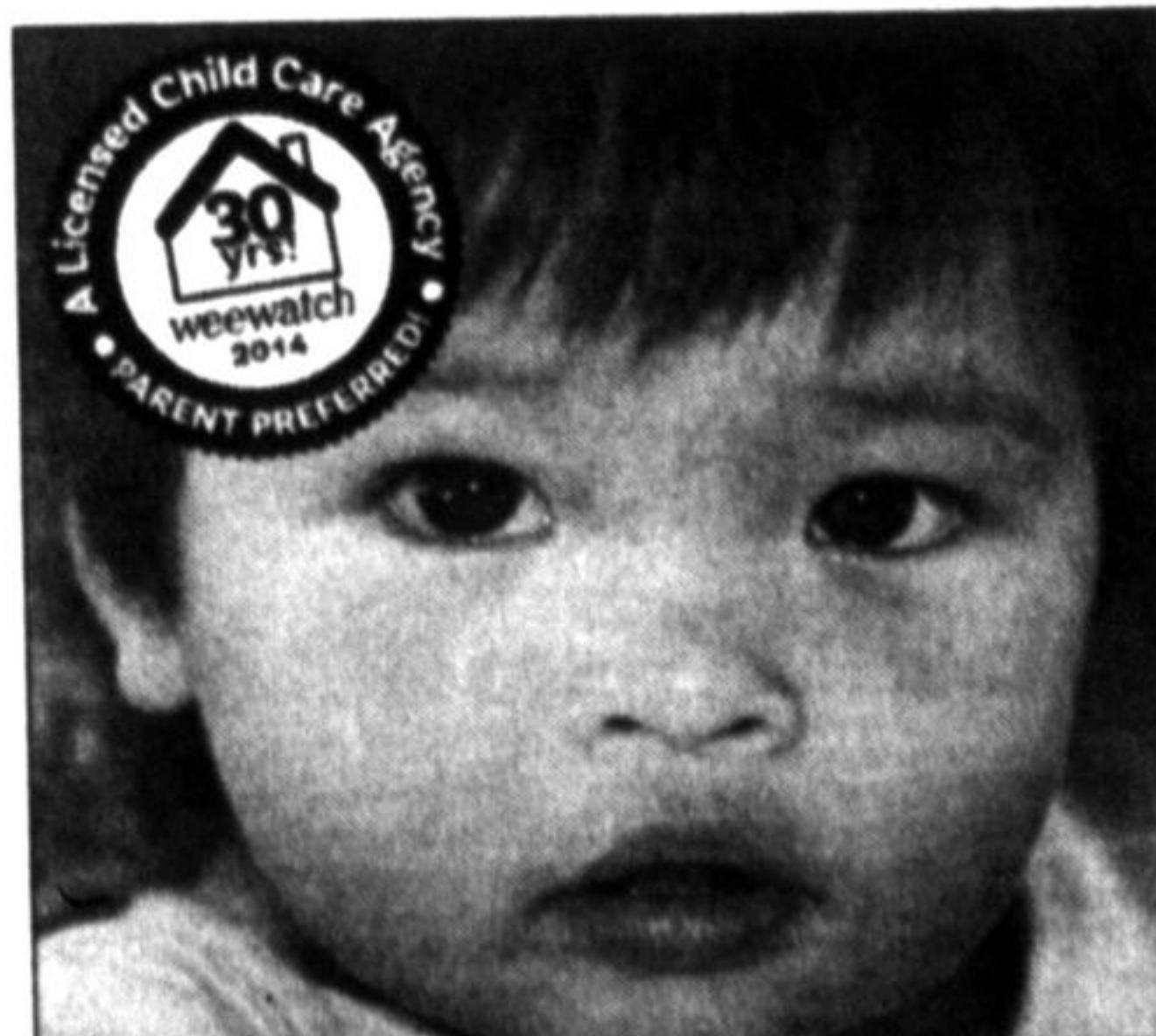
"When they freely give of their time, it's priceless," Park said.

The site has opportunities for administrative help, handymen, healthcare and legal services, to name a few.

The reasons for volunteering are as unique as the person, but among the more common reasons are job experience and socialization.

"There's more to this community and more to life than keeping your head down and doing the minimum," according to Park.

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