



Dr. Diane Williams and her granddaughter Cassie Williams, 6, serenade participants in the St. Paul's PACE program Wednesday. PEGGY PEATTIE • U-T

PRESENTS BRIGHTEN SENIORS' DAY

Modest requests by members of program result in gift bonanza

MICHAEL STETZ • U-T

Dan Siminoski scored Wednesday. He received four movie tickets and a \$20 gift card to a multiplex for Christmas. And what else goes better with movies than popcorn? Well, he got that, too.

The 62-year-old had asked for a single movie ticket. He thought that would be more than enough for him.

Then some serious Christmas magic hit the St. Paul's PACE program, in which he's enrolled.

Siminoski and other seniors were asked what they wanted for Christmas, and they responded with the most meager of requests: shampoo, soap, a razor. One person wished for a pillow. Another requested white socks. Still another asked for boxer shorts.

One senior hoped for a mop and a bucket.

The simplicity and sparseness touched hearts across the county. Donations poured in. The seniors enjoyed the bounty Wednesday during a Christmas party at the PACE center in Bankers Hill.

"I'd rather go to a movie than go to Hawaii," said Siminoski, who is disabled and has no family in the San Diego area. "I'm very grateful."

PACE stands for Pro-

gram of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly. It offers a wide range of daily services, such as meals, physical therapy and health care, so seniors can live independently in their own homes.

The program's executives know that Christmas can be a tough time for their clients, who number nearly 140.

"They truly look at us as family," said Carol Hubbard, the executive director. "Chances are many of them will be alone in their apartments on Christmas."

The seniors were overjoyed with the gifts Wednesday. They carefully unwrapped them, smiling. They wore festive hats. They sang Christmas songs.

Margaret Murphy, 74, came to the party alone. Her husband of 43 years, Jack, died last year.

She received a house coat — just what she had asked for. Why that item?

"It's something I needed," Murphy said.

Wednesday's presents were supplied by the Pima Medical Institute in Chula Vista, which learned of the seniors' situation from media coverage. The PACE program simply didn't have the money to get all the gifts on the seniors' wish list, given its growing number of clients.

Pima faculty members decided to forgo their gift exchange and use that money to buy items for the seniors. Students at the institute also chipped in by holding fundraisers. The school raised \$2,000 in all.

Students and teachers were on hand Wednesday to hand out the gifts.

Last month, The San Diego Union-Tribune published a story about the seniors' wishes. More than 100 people who read the article sent e-mails to PACE asking how they could help. Two upstairs rooms in the Bankers Hill center are being used to store the gifts that came pouring in.

One company donated 200 shoes. Others gave candy, clothing, toiletries. The seniors will be getting additional presents throughout the holiday season because of the public's generosity, PACE officials said.

Many of the seniors are on fixed incomes and even basic, everyday items are welcomed.

Ruth Harris, 81, got a \$25 gift card Wednesday, which she'll use for some sort of necessity. Maybe shoes, she said.

"I don't need anything elaborate."

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