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Newport fire unit gives lift to Santa

Gifts delivered to four families via fire engine

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NEWPORT - Santa Claus was seen Wednesday night in Newport.

However, he had traded in his reindeer for a fire engine.

He stopped at the homes of four families in need and delivered gifts for 19 children.

Newport Firefighters Union IAFF Local 45 started escorting Santa Claus in 1993, said Mike Volz, vice president of the union.

"We make a lot of runs in the community, and around Christmas time we were doing a lot of those," said Volz.

"We were going into a lot of these houses and found out there were a lot of kids who didn't have gifts or Christmas trees - nothing was provided around the holidays."

The union organized fundraisers and scheduled with Santa to deliver the toys.

This year's children - ranging from 14 months to 9 years old - got presents worth \$2,000.

Since starting in 1993, 234 children from 56 families have been given presents worth over \$19,000.

The firefighters try to find out what each child wants and let Santa know.

"They tell us an interest or hobby - Batman or Spiderman or Bratz dolls. If they need clothes or shoes, we get those. A lot of times they'll need coats, too, so they get them," said paramedic engineer John Bloomfield.

Bloomfield has helped Santa deliver toys seven times in his 11 years in the department.

"When we pull up to the individual houses, most of the time they are anticipating and waiting for us to get there," said Bloomfield.

"They are very surprised that Santa Claus comes to their house."

Families are selected by the Family Resource Centers (FRC) at A.D. Owens, Mildred Dean, and Fourth Street elementary schools in Newport.

The parents of the families, after being contacted, expressed interest in participating in the program, and provided the FRC with wish lists.
