
Labor of Love Rewards Children, MTA Volunteers at Eastertime

By CHRISTINA ESPARZA

(March 29, 2002) While they ran around with construction paper rabbit ears, received Easter baskets and did the bunny hop, youngsters at Children's Institute International had no idea their day of fun almost didn't happen.

But, thanks to the quick thinking and the big hearts at Crossroads Depot Division 2 and the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, the abused and neglected children spent Thursday with smiles on their faces and candy in their tummies.

"Last year, we participated by volunteering to put the baskets together and deliver them," said Division 2 Mechanic Art Aguilar. "But this year, Cal Fed had no funding. So, in a week, we raised \$600, which bought us 127 baskets."

Aguilar, and Division 2 Bus Operator Robert Rodriguez started fundraising and asked Transit Operations Manager Diane Frazier and Maintenance Manager Randy McIntyre help out by urging the MTA employees to give.

"Between operators and maintenance, it went from \$1 donations to \$60 donations," Aguilar said. "Our slogan was '\$2 is worth a child's smile.' It was a united effort."

Aguilar's wife, Lorraine, and Rodriguez's 15-year-old daughter, Lori, also volunteered to put a smile on a child's face. Working with them were five volunteers affiliated with the AFL-CIO, including the American Federation of Government Employees, whose members raised money for another 100 baskets.

"I enjoyed the day immensely," Lorraine Aguilar said. "You give money and you usually don't see the results, and to see the results is very gratifying."

Although Lori Rodriguez is on her spring break and didn't get to sleep until about 2 a.m., Thursday, she still wore a big smile at 7:30 a.m. when she thought about her work.

"I love volunteering for things like this," she said. "If I was in that



Crossroads Depot Division 2 Mechanic Art Aguilar and Bus Operator Robert Rodriguez (left and right, rear), with members of their families and the AFL-CIO spent Thursday handing out Easter baskets to abused and neglected children at the Children's Institute International.

Youngsters from Children's Institute International are excited to see Mr. and Mrs. Bunny.



situation, I hope people would volunteer for me."

Although the funding was nixed, the special bus designated to deliver the baskets wasn't available, and the Mr. Bunny costume had a loose wire, the volunteers were thrilled to contribute their time and efforts.

"People think Art and I are crazy," Robert Rodriguez said. "But we do it from our hearts. That's the part I emphasize with my daughter."

Corey Ford, from the Los Angeles Teleservice Center for Social Security, dressed as Mrs. Bunny and endured the heat inside the costume.



Three-year-old Kalonie enjoys an Easter basket and tickle from Mrs. Bunny.

"It's worth all we go through to get it together," she said. "The reward is those kids."

And the kids appreciate it.

The MTA and AFL-CIO have been visiting on Easter every year since Barbara Barnes, the center's volunteer program manager, arrived in 1996.

"The children really look forward to it," she said. "The children get totally excited. It's a thrill because they get Easter baskets that they might not get otherwise. We're so appreciative of the volunteer effort. The MTA has been great."

The children — mostly babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers — couldn't wait to sit on the bunnies' laps.

"I love bunnies," said 3-year-old Kalonie, eyeing her basketful of toys and sweets. "And I love candy."

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