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CEO Art Leahy presides over annual donation of gifts for needy families served by Fred Jordan Mission. *Photo by Luis Inzunza*

Employees Fill Metro Bus with Gifts for Needy Families

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(Dec. 17, 2009) Standing close to more than 2,000 gifts donated by Metro employees, Willie Jordan, president of the Fred Jordan Missions, was thankful as she received the donations during a presentation on Dec. 16 in the plaza in front of the Gateway Headquarters Building.

"These are more than toys. They're gifts of hope to the family and inner city," Jordan said as she thanked Metro employees for the 14th annual gift giving effort coordinated by the Metro Diversity and Economic Opportunity Department.



Santa and Metro Employees help Willie Jordan, president of the Fred Jordan Missions, load more than 2,000 gifts onto an articulated Metro Bus for delivery to the Fred Jordan Mission.

"There's scarcely a child anywhere... who doesn't look forward to the man in the red suit," Jordan said. "Many of the children live in a garage with dirt floors, live 12, 14 or more people in a one bedroom apartment... Some live under freeway overpasses or bridges. So when Santa comes to town in beautiful new Metro buses loaded with these toys, we know that Christmas has arrived."

Linda Wright, DEO of Diversity and Economic Opportunity, thanked Metro employees and recognized Metro CEO Art Leahy, Deputy CEO Paul Taylor and Interim Chief of Operations Lonnie Mitchell for the support of the effort.

"I want to thank everyone for helping us to bring a smile to children this year. As you can see from bikes to backpacks, and everything in between. It's really, really wonderful," said Wright.



To set the holiday spirit free, Metro Choir is joined by children from the Gateway Child Care Center for a rousing chorus of 'Jingle Bells'.



After the presentation, CEO Leahy and others jumped in to help load the bags of toys onto the waiting buses, which carried the gifts to the mission where they'll be distributed next week to the children of Skid Row.

"We have more than 2,000 gifts donated by Metro. And I'm really proud of my co-workers for doing this. I'm really pleased about the contributions we can make to a happy Christmas," said Leahy.

Tashai Smith, serving her sixth year as lead coordinator of the Gift Giving Drive, took on the project after the retirement of Bessie Rush-Johnson, the founder and original coordinator of Metro's gift-giving partnership with the Fred Jordan Missions.

"We started planning in early October," said Smith. The coordinated effort included three open houses held simultaneously at the Gateway building, the Metro Support Services Center and the Rail Operations Center.

"Watching to see all of the great toys and other items the employees bring in from bikes,



Organizer Tashai Smith, right, confers with Willie Jordan, president of the Fred Jordan Missions, at the culmination of the 2009 Gift-Giving Drive.

skateboards, games, toy trucks, canned goods, backpacks, is the best part. And, every year, the quality gets better. The number of toys is great, but when you look at the quality of the gifts that come in – you truly see the generosity of the employees,” said Smith.

Two mid-sized bicycles were among the piles of gifts that nearly filled the plaza.

--from staff reports