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For Immediate Release:

Christmas Village Toy Store Expands Regionally

New Way of Charitable Giving Rises in Popularity

(Greenville, NC) – November 10, 2014: When it comes to traditional giving and the holiday season, many think of gift-buying programs that are largely anonymous and one-directional. There's a new model emerging locally focused on more of an exchange, one that focuses on a hand-up, not a hand-out.

This new giving effort, debuted in Pitt County at Third Street Community Center last year, is called Christmas Village Toy Store. The store, which was stocked with donations from area churches, offered families in need a chance to buy toys for their children for a fraction of the retail price. Invitations to shop on special shopping days before Christmas were distributed by local organizations, agencies and schools. Funds raised through the program are reinvested into the local community by employing individuals to help setup and operate the store.

This year the program expands into Beaufort County at the Old Washington High School in Washington with over 600 invitations being distributed to shoppers in both counties.

Beyond expanding geographically, the program will add a "Kidz Shoppe" this year which will allow children to earn Kidz Bucks which can be used to purchase gifts for parents.

"The response and results from year one have been remarkable. We have many more groups and churches expressing interest this year I believe in part because this model of giving is just more effective. Enabling those who couldn't otherwise purchase gifts for their loved ones in this way brings dignity to the giving equation." Said Walter Strathy, Executive Director of Third Street Community Center in West Greenville.

Strathy knows first-hand what it feels like to be on the receiving end of typical well-meaning programs. As a young child he recalls his mother's tear-filled response when strangers dropped off Christmas gifts in a garbage bag one year. "I don't really know why she cried. I'm not sure if she was frustrated or disappointed, but I don't believe it was because she was full of joy." Walter said.

Strathy and others aim to double the scope and reach of the program this year. "This is just a great opportunity to make a difference in the community in what could be a very difficult time of year for many local families." Said Donna Sheets, Director of Connect Community Center, the parent organization that operates Christmas Village Toy Stores in Eastern North Carolina.

About Connect Community Center

Connect Community Center is a Greenville, NC faith-based, non-profit organization dedicated to bringing together community resources and organizations for greater impact in our region.