

## Church dream center brings holiday smiles

By Justin Much

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Dream Center volunteers mixed in a bit of work, a bit of organizing and a bit of Kriss Kringle to yield an enchanting holiday whirlwind that brought smiles to many.

By the New Year, Dream Center outreach pastor Craig Oviatt was able to look back over the holiday season's work and feel good about the efforts, and the smiles. He also received a Christmas gift in the potential donation of an older Edgewater home, which, if it can be moved to the preferred location, could become the permanent home of the Dream Center.

The heavy part of the seasonal project, which has been a growing tradition over the past five years, required the sorting, packing and moving of 180 food boxes.

"We were able to give three boxes of food to each of our Dream Center families," said Center volunteer Lindsay Blackman. "They were filled with turkeys, hams, potatoes, canned food, onions, apples, rice, beans, pies — you name it. Plus we had a few more gifts to give out."

As described, it was a project requiring some heavy lifting.

"There was a lot of food," Oviatt affirmed, estimating the weight of each box between 50 and 60 pounds. "We had to use hand trucks because the boxes were so heavy. "

The deliveries were made Monday before Christmas, and included a plethora of gifts that the Center volunteers wrapped the previous weekend.

On Christmas Eve the culmination of a second project — operation "Sneaky Elf" — saw 250 Edgewater households receive home-baked cookies.

Oviatt said scores of people from around the community volunteered to bake, another dozen or more helped sort and 10 volunteers went out in the wee hours of the morning to play Kriss Kringle and deliver the goodies on doorsteps.

"Last year we got caught, but this year we made (the delivery) without anyone catching us," Oviatt said. "We've done this for five years, and we started really small. We've done more and



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Esteban Gayton of West Salem hugs a Christmas present received through the Four Square Church's Dream Center.

### Dream Center

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more each year; we'd like to do all of Edgewater someday."

Someday the Dream Center, which is currently located at Foursquare Church, hopes to have its own home. Prospects for that goal were enhanced after Oviatt was contacted just before Christmas about the Edgewater home. The owner planned to tear it down and build on the lot, but if logistics and land negotiations can be worked out, the home could become a permanent one for the Center.

Oviatt said a permanent home would enable the volunteers to offer more, such as ESL, nutrition and finance classes.

"A good majority of the people we reach out to are scared of the establishment," he said. "They won't go to Walker (to attend basic needs classes), but they will go where we are."