



Communities
Connected
for Kids



Connections - December 1, 2021



A mom barely holds back tears after Judge Robert Meadows finalizes the adoption of her son, one of more than 30 such ceremonies that marked November's National Adoption Month in Okeechobee & the Treasure Coast.

Santa's Back in Town!

and he's driving a Rytech truck

St. Lucie West – Holiday preparations are in full swing at [CCKids](#), and none of it would be possible without the commitment of sponsors and donors throughout the area.

One sponsor who has stayed happily for four years in the project's background - or on the highway - is [Rytech](#), a water damage restoration and mold remediation company.

The company picks up collections from throughout the four counties, brings them to the project's central hub for sorting and distribution and then delivers them back out again to CCKids service centers and awaiting case managers.

"I don't even know how we would do it anymore without them," said Debbie Butler, president of [Guardians for New Futures](#), CCKids' gift drive partner. "They dedicate their entire staff and all their trucks and equipment; even the owner participates."

Butler said the company's co-owner, Maria MacInnes, reached out to her four years ago and offered to help with what was then a much-smaller project.

"I'm thinking, 'Oh they want to do a gift drive at their office,' but she said, 'No, we want to help you pick up and drop off gifts."

"Talk about giving back to your community," Butler said.

Rytech's involvement is largely responsible for the project's growth in recent years. At some point, even the best projects reach a point when they can't keep up with supply or demand, said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director. They just get too big.

"Rytech literally keeps the wheels turning and helps us with logistics that would otherwise crush us," she said.

Originally the founders of two smaller gift drives, CCKids and the Guardians combined their efforts in 2019 and merged the two drives into one. Last year, their merged efforts provided 6,000 gifts to more than 2,000 children, including all children in the local foster care system, as well as those served by several schools and victims' advocates groups.

The project also helps individuals in the community who need a little extra help during the holiday season.

"I remember one man who lost his job," Butler said. "We helped him for two years, then last year he called and sponsored two families."

The project is driven by small businesses, social groups and individuals who coordinate small, local gift drives and by individuals who "adopt" specific children to fulfill their Christmas wishes. Corporate sponsors such as [Audi Stuart](#) and [Berry Fresh](#) contribute financially ensuring that even those children

who were not sponsored in the community receive the gifts they requested.

And none of it would be possible without a large, open - thankfully air-conditioned - space to receive, sort, organize and distribute all those toys. Last year's literal real estate angel was [Barron Real Estate](#). This year it's [Indian River State College](#), which is lending the project unused space on its Pruitt campus.

"We really want for nothing," Butler said. "Every year may bring a new need, a new challenge, but every year those needs and challenges are met."



Toy Collection Begins Monday

Stuart – Like every year for the past two decades, CCKids works with a network of longtime holiday partners to make the Christmas wishes of children in the Circuit 19 Dependency system come true.

We will be out next week stopping by each of those partner businesses, churches and social groups to collect the toys that will become part of the CCKids/Guardians for New Futures holiday gift project.

CCKids is able to provide gifts to all children in care thanks to the generosity of these groups and to the dozens of partners and individuals working with the Guardians.

It is with the deepest gratitude that we thank these 2021 Christmas angels who coordinated their own toy drives and collected gifts for children throughout Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties:

- Berry Fresh Cafe of Stuart and Port St. Lucie, Clark Advanced Learning Center NHS, [Translations USA](#), Kappa Kappa Iota, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church of Port St. Lucie,
- The Grove Church, [Pursuit Boats](#), Sydney's Aquasizers, First United Methodist Church of Port St. Lucie, La Buona Vita, Unity of Fort Pierce, Harbor Insurance,
- [Tropicana](#), HOSA of St. Lucie West Centennial High School, Steele Shears Hair Studio, Sparemakers, Seacoast Bank, Treasure Coast Builders Association, the JROTC Jaguar Battalion of Port St. Lucie High School,
- [Sungrove Montessori](#), the Retired Educators of St. Lucie County, Indian River State College and the Florida Highway Patrol.

Many of these groups are run by individuals who have experienced hard times, including loss of business or employment. And yet, they continue to support the annual gift drive.

Please consider supporting them in return.
