

Christmas Bureau sets up new storefront

Group gets new spot in Brentwood Town Centre to use for annual drive to help needy families, kids

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They started with a toy box in the mall to help collect presents for low-income Burnaby families. Now, Brentwood Town Centre is opening the doors to one of its storefronts to let the Burnaby Christmas Bureau in for free.

"It was an opportunity we weren't expecting, but we're very grateful for," said Stephen D'Souza, executive director of Burnaby Community Connections, the non-profit group that facilitates the bureau. "Brentwood has been so welcoming and excited to have us."

Burnaby Community Connections used to run the bureau's toy room out of the Burnaby Heights Resource Centre, but they were forced to move because the city wanted to close the building down. The organization moved to its new location near Holdom SkyTrain station about a year ago, but the space isn't big enough to collect and distribute toys for the program.

"We've been looking for a year, and we had a really difficult time looking for a place. Brentwood (Town Centre) just stepped forward," D'Souza said. "They've really tried to make this a retail experience like any other family would have."

Brian Wong is the manager of Brentwood Town Centre.

"We thought that it would be good for the community and good for the Christmas Bureau to have a high profile and more convenient location to operate the Christmas Bureau this year," he said, adding the location is very convenient for donors to drop off presents while they are shopping. "We're just very happy to be in a position to assist to the cause."

The bureau offers food certificates and new toys to local, low-income families. The idea is that every child has a gift to open Christmas morning and every family can have a traditional holiday meal. The bureau relies on donations of cash and new presents.

Last Christmas, the bureau gave out \$132,000 worth of gift certificates for food to 4,400 people and enough toys for 2,432 kids.



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Santa's helpers: The folks behind the Burnaby Christmas Bureau are moving the program's toy room into a storefront at Brentwood Town Centre. From left, MJ Buck, Marney Godkin, Kejo Buchanan, Justine Marshall, Sue Spencer, Stephen D'Souza and Claudine Souza.

Families that want to register with the bureau can do so by visiting the toy room at Brentwood Town Centre, but make sure you have all the necessary documents. (See information on page 4 for details.)

People can help by donating money or new, packaged toys.

The bureau is not accepting used items because of concerns about the H1N1 virus.

Registration for families is on till Dec. 5. Register by visiting Brentwood Town Centre and go to unit 200 on the second floor, next to Sears. The toy room is open 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on weekdays.

On Wednesday, they have extended hours: 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. plus 4 to 8 p.m. They will be closed Remembrance Day.

For more details on the program, visit www.burnabycommunityconnections.com or call 604-299-5778.

HOW TO REGISTER

To apply for the Burnaby Christmas Bureau, families must be: residents of Burnaby; have children 18 years and younger; and, be on income assistance or from a low-income working family.

You must have all necessary documents in order to process your application: child tax benefit or CareCard or birth certificate with your children's names and birthdays on it; and, proof of residency (phone bill, hydro bill or tenancy agreement, with your name and address on it.)

If you are not on income assistance, you must have two current pay cheques or EI stubs.

If you are on income assistance, you must have a current income assistance cheque stub.

If you don't have cheque stubs, you can bring along tax forms: a 2008 T1 General for each adult in the family and a 2008 notice of assessment for each adult in the family.

If you are new to the country and don't have any tax documents yet, you need to bring your record of landing or confirmation of permanent residency (the immigration papers you receive from customs when you arrive in Canada).

If you are on a student loan, you need to bring your student loan papers.

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