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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2008). *Newsroom*. 278.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/278>

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Georgia Southern University Shows Its Holiday Spirit

DECEMBER 10, 2008



The Georgia Southern University community made a very special delivery this holiday season.

Volunteers with the University's 15th annual Holiday Helpers campaign delivered presents this week to those less-fortunate in the Statesboro community. Georgia Southern students, faculty and staff donated gifts to more than 800 people this year.

'This program serves as Georgia Southern University's gift to our community for the holidays,' said Holiday Helpers coordinator Eileen Sconyers. 'It's just awesome to watch the enthusiasm by our campus family every year. They go all out.'

Local agencies provide the Holiday Helpers campaign with names and gift ideas for local individuals or families who need a hand during the holiday season. Tags listing the names and desired gifts are displayed on the Holiday Helpers tree at Lakeside Cafe, and anyone affiliated with Georgia Southern is encouraged to take a tag or two and buy the gifts.

'Every year they do such a beautiful job,' said Almarita Donaldson, director of Statesboro Head Start, after volunteers delivered gifts to the center. 'We have 80 families who will be so grateful for these donations.'

About 200 volunteers helped in some way to make Holiday Helpers a success again this year, according to Sconyers. She said the organizers started contacting agencies in September and volunteers have put in countless hours since then, assisting with the daily tag checkout at the tree, wrapping presents as they were brought in, and delivering the gifts.

For many of the volunteers, being a Holiday Helper is an annual tradition. Beau Turpin, a senior Communication Arts major, said he has participated since his freshman year, along with many of his Kappa Sigma fraternity brothers.

'It's really rewarding to see the children's faces when we give them the gifts,' Turpin said. 'You're really giving these children a Christmas.'

Other people in the community, like Lisa Alderman, have experienced Holiday Helpers from more than one perspective. Alderman first was a Holiday Helpers volunteer when she was a Georgia Southern student. Following her graduation from the University earlier this year, Alderman became

an instructor for the High Hope Foundation, an agency that assists people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

‘I used to be [at Georgia Southern] collecting gifts, now I’m here seeing people receive them,” Alderman said. ‘I get to see their expression and how happy they are to receive even the smallest gift, like a handkerchief or a bar of soap. They talk about it all the time.’”

The volunteers look forward to it as well. All of the more than 800 tags were taken from the Holiday Helpers tree before the deadline, and every last one was turned in with the requested gift.

‘Hopefully this program instills in our students the importance of helping people in the community who need it,” Sconyers said. ‘We’re in the middle of final exams, and they took time to help.’”

The Holiday Helpers program is sponsored by the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. For a complete list of participating agencies, visit <http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/leadership>.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers more than 110 degree programs serving nearly 18,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia’s largest, is a top choice of Georgia’s HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education.

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