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Food, toys, services draw thousands to event for needy



By **Greg Moran**

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Despite the rain, the wind and the mud, thousands of people lined up around Memorial Park and Recreation Center yesterday for an early bit of Christmas.

The 13th annual Toys for Joy event at the park at 30th Street and Ocean View Boulevard offered toys for children and a variety of services for adults and families.

Soccer balls and stuffed animals, dolls and games were all free.

Organizers expected to hand out 10,000 toys to children and 60,000 pounds of food to families by the end of the day.

The festival was started 13 years ago by Pastor Miles McPherson of The Rock Church. Since its inception, Toys for Joy has joined with Convoy of Hope, a national organization providing food and water to the needy across the country.

About two dozen area churches and community agencies as well as numerous businesses participate.

The event was staffed with about 2,000 volunteers.

Toys for Joy offered health services, live music and even a small “snow zone” where young and old could pitch a snowball or two.

Yesterday, crowds milled about in the occasionally heavy rain, some waiting for haircuts, dental appointments or eye exams, all for free.

Free clothing and job assistance was also available.

Music blared from a covered stage as dozens of hardy families huddled underneath covered tables to eat.

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“It’s a great opportunity to serve the people of the community and have some fun before Christmas,” she said.

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