

Community & People • Public Safety

Columbia Heights Shop with a Cop helps families in need

Published December 30, 2016 at 2:16 pm

By Sarah Burghardt

The annual Columbia Heights Police Department Shop with a Cop program set a record in both donations and number of families helped this year. A total of 17 families got the chance to buy gifts for their children at Target with the generous donations that were raised by the community.

The Columbia Heights Police Association makes this event possible by gathering donations from members and local businesses. This year's donations totaled more than \$7,000. Sgt. Justin Pletcher said many officers and their families donated to raise funds this year.



Grandmother Hortencia Rojas shops with Sgt. Justin Pletcher and Police Office Manager Karen Olson. Thanks to generous donations through the Columbia Heights Police Association, Rojas and many other families had the opportunity to provide gifts for their children. (Sun Focus staff photo by Sarah Burghardt)

“It was probably the biggest participation that we’ve had from the police and their families,” Pletcher said.

Members of the police department also donate their time and participate in the program while off duty.

Each parent or guardian is allotted money based on how many children are in the family.

Hortencia Rojas shopped with Pletcher and Police Office Manager Karen Olson, checking off the

Christmas list of games and toys for her six grandchildren.

“They’re adorable, they’re all really good kids ... when they want to be,” she says with a laugh. Rojas had a cart filled knickknacks from a large Batman, Nom Nums, and ice cream cones with a side of green frosting.

Rojas said that the kids wanted to make their own frosted Christmas trees complete with sprinkle ornaments.

Many Shop with a Cop programs in surrounding communities involve the children in the shopping, but Pletcher said that the Columbia Heights program likes to get the parents to do the shopping.

“It’s more personal for the parents, grandparents, or guardians to give the presents to their kids,” he said. “All we want to do is make sure that the family and the kids have a good Christmas and happy holiday.”

This way, children can still have the joy of waking up to the arrival of Santa Claus, Pletcher said.

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Hortencia Rojas looks for Pokemon cards for her grandson. (Sun Focus staff photo by Sarah Burghardt)

