

Operation Santa brings Christmas early to Redwood Elementary School

December 26, 2019



Christmas came early Dec. 19 for students at Redwood Elementary School in Smith River, thanks to employees of Pelican Bay State Prison - and Santa Claus.

Through the prison's annual Operation Santa, about 100 kindergartners and first-graders at the school had presents delivered in person by Jolly Ol' Saint Nick himself.

Operation Santa, now in its ninth year, rotates to a different school each holiday season where students write out their wish list of four presents in a letter to Santa Claus.

The letters then are "rerouted" to Pelican Bay State Prison. Employees and staff from each department select a letter and purchase gifts off the wish list, using their own money.

Officers from the prison help deliver the presents to the school. One-by-one, a present is handed to Santa, who reads the name and personally hands each child a gift.

The students are asked to wait until everyone has a gift in hand before opening them. Dolls, skateboards and bikes were among the most-sought presents wishes.

Organizers said some that students, however, actually wished for supplies for their classrooms in the true spirit of the holiday.

Redwood School Principal Theresa Slayton said the prison's Operation Santa is an amazing program. "They are so generous. To carry this off is wonderful.

"They worked with teachers two to three months ago. The teachers helped write the letters and delivered them by Thanksgiving. We have a large number of homeless families here, so this may be the only gift (a student gets)."