

How Toys for Tots Works

The U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program is directed by the Commander, Marine Forces Reserve, with the assistance of the staff from the Marine Forces Reserve Headquarters in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charity, is the authorized fund raising and support organization for the Toys for Tots Program. The Foundation provides the funding and support needed for successful annual toy collection and distribution campaigns. The Foundation staff is headquartered in the Cooper Center located just outside the main gate of Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia, about 35 miles south of Washington, DC.

Local campaigns are conducted annually in over 700 communities covering all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The Commander, Marine Forces Reserve has under his/her command 163 Reserve Units located in 47 states. To cover all 50 states and more communities in each state, the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation selects Marine Corps League Detachments and Local Community Organizations (generally veteran Marines) located in communities without a Marine Reserve Center, to conduct Toys for Tots campaigns as part of the overall U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program.

One individual, either a Marine, member of a Marine Corps League Detachment, or member of a local community organization, is designated the Toys for Tots Coordinator for that community. The Coordinator is responsible for planning, organizing and conducting the campaign in his/her community.

Local toy collection campaigns begin in October and last until mid- to late-December. Toy distribution also takes place in mid- to late-December. Members of the community drop new, unwrapped toys in collection boxes positioned in local businesses. Coordinators pick up these toys and store them in local warehouses where the toys are sorted by age and gender. At Christmas, Coordinators, with the assistance of local social welfare agencies, church groups, and other local community agencies, distribute the toys to the less fortunate children in the community. Over the years, Marines have established close working relationships with social welfare agencies, churches and other local community agencies that are well qualified to identify the needy children in the community and play important roles in toy distribution.

While Toys for Tots Coordinators organize, coordinate, and manage the campaign, the ultimate success depends on the support of the local community and the generosity of the people that donate toys and/or funds.

Local business leaders play key roles. They allow Coordinators to locate drop-off/collection boxes in their stores; provide free warehouse space for storing and sorting toys during October, November and December; provide vehicles to collect toys from drop-off sites; sponsor fundraising events; and help Coordinators arrange medial exposure for Toys for Tots in the local community.

Several national corporations support Toys for Tots by establishing affiliations with the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. These corporations make donations to the Foundation or conduct/ cause marketing initiatives from which they share royalties with the Foundation. In almost every instance, the marketing initiatives of these corporations give significant added visibility and name recognition to Toys for Tots. Such visibility enhances the campaign at the national and local levels. The resulting funds enable the Foundation to purchase toys to supplement local collections; purchase promotion and other support materials; and defray the costs of annual Toys for Tots campaigns.