



Santa makes a surprise visit to the center to thank children for helping the needy. | Rob Dicker~Sun-Times Media

## Childhood center gets lots of help in holiday effort

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When Santa Claus visited the Lindenhurst Early Childhood Center recently, he wasn't there to hear children's wish lists or give them presents.

Instead, he wanted to thank the children for the work they were doing for the needy. Each year, the Early Childhood Center holds a "Gift of Giving" campaign, collecting items like toys, food and clothing for residents in need.

On Dec. 14, the children were given boxes to fill with various items, including cans of green beans, spaghetti sauce, pasta, canned tomatoes, cookies, boxed cake mixes and toiletries.

The children filled 400 boxes, which were then given to Lake County agencies, including the Lake Villa and Avon Township food pantries, Open Arms Mission, Lake County Hous-



Darlene Martyka helps her grandson, Logan Castiglia, 4, pack boxes for the needy at the Lindenhurst Early Childhood Center on Dec. 14. | Rob Dicker~Sun-Times Media

ing Authority, People Lending Assistance Network Food Pantry and the Department of Children & Family Services.

"I'm very, very proud to

see you guys do that," Santa told the children.

The Early Childhood Center has held its Gift of Giving program for 19 years.

"What's important is the

repetition," Frank Davis, the center's director, said of teaching the children the importance of giving to others. "People ask, 'Do they get it?'

"It's just like sports and music - you have to practice. They're going to get good at it.

"We just want them to be active community members."

The center met its goal of filling 400 food boxes.

"The big helper in that is Uline," said Davis. "They give us the boxes and lids and deliver them for nothing."

The center also collected more than 400 new toys, thanks to residents and the generosity of businesses and organizations like the Round Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Round Lake Area Library, Lake Villa Timberwolves and Cardinal Fitness.

"Those are all going to stay local," Davis said of the

