

Disney VoluntEARS Dress Up Holidays for Local Children

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., Dec. 14, 2011 – For more than 20 years, Vernell Erkins has volunteered her time for a tradition that makes the holidays brighter for more than 1,000 local children. Erkins is one of hundreds of Cast Members at Walt Disney World Resort who outfit teddy bears in a variety of costumes, for youngsters to unwrap during the holidays.

“Growing up, my children loved teddy bears, so if we can dress up some bears and make other kids happy, well, that’s great,” Erkins said.

This year, approximately 2,000 Salvation Army teddy bears were delivered to Cast Members in housekeeping, security, costuming, transportation and other roles. Cast Members challenge their creativity by costuming the bears as ballet dancers, basketball players, pirates and princesses, and even some Disney characters such as Tigger and Eeyore.

Desiree Gonzalez, who also works at Distribution Services, gets her family involved, too. Gonzalez’s 7-year-old daughter suggested concepts for the bears’ costumes, including a firefighter “because they are heroes” and a baseball player because it’s a sport she and her daughter watch together.

Greg Ruse, vice president of Construction, Horticulture, Textile Services and Distribution Services, is an Orlando advisory board member for the Salvation Army, which sponsors the program.

“The Dress-A-Bear program is one of many ways our Disney Cast Members get involved in the local community during the holidays,” Ruse said. “Some of the Cast Members really show off their creative talents, and it’s heartwarming to know that children in our own community are going to unwrap these bears on Christmas morning.”

The Salvation Army donation is one of many charitable activities as part of the “Season of Sharing,” Walt Disney World Resort’s effort to make the holiday season a little merrier for those who need it most.