



Photo by Ena Sellers

**Serious about giving:** From left, Marines Sgt. Jared Peer, Cpl. Jeffrey Crompton, Gunnery Sgt. George Roan, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Commander Col. Adele E. Hodges, Staff Sgt. David Swope, Sgt. William Rivers and Sgt. Marc Morris mean business when it comes to collecting toys for children. All of the Marines, except Hodges, are in Company F, 4th Tank Battalion.

## **‘Tis the season: Toys for Tots campaign kicks off on Lejeune**

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Underneath a huge Christmas tree beautifully-decorated with all the delights of the season, the 60th Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots toy drive kicked off Friday morning at the Marine Corps Exchange aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

This year’s Toys for Tots Coordinator 1st Sgt. Dwight D. Jones, inspector-instructor 1st sergeant for Company F, 4th Tank Battalion, began the ceremony with some brief comments.

Col. Adele E. Hodges, Marine Corps Base commander, gave the keynote address. “This is something we do to give back,” she said. “Hopefully, we will collect enough toys so that we can satisfy the needs of our local community.”

Then the big moment came as the invited dignitaries made their way to the toy collection boxes, fashioned to look like train cars, to cut the red ribbon to signal the official kick-off of the seasonal Toys for Tots collection.

Lt. Gen. Keith J. Stadler, commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force, and his wife Susan were on hand for the ribbon-cutting as were Maj. Gen. Robert Dickerson, commanding general for Marine Corps Installations East; Hodges; Capt. Clymouth Roos, inspector-instructor for Company F, 4th Tank Battalion and Jones.

After the ribbon-cutting, each person came forward to drop their donation into the toy collection boxes.

Jones, who is responsible for collecting toys for Onslow, Jones, Duplin and Lenoir counties, was pleased with the outcome of the ceremony. Now the mission of toy collection can start in earnest. "I'm just hoping that the community will be supportive. When they see Marines and the drop boxes around, I hope that they realize that we are here to fill those drop boxes to support the children," said Jones.

Sgt. Marc Morris, supply chief for Company F, 4th Tank Battalion, attended the kick-off. Morris, who is now in his eighth year of participation in the Toys for Tots program, said that he really enjoys the volunteer effort. "It's special for me because of the whole concept of giving and that we're doing it for kids who are in need," he said.

Morris said that his favorite Toys for Tots memory was guiding a grandmother around the warehouse where donated toys were housed to pick up the toys for her family. "At every station, she was crying and saying 'thank you.' She was very appreciative. To see the happiness and the emotion when families are walking through to get their toys [is amazing]," said Morris.

The Toys for Tots program was created in the Los Angeles area by Maj. Bill Hendricks in 1947. After his wife asked him to donate a home-made doll to an organization that would deliver it to a child in need and finding no such outlet, Hendricks decided to fill that void. His original effort led to the collection of more than 5,000 toys.

The Marine Corps adopted the Toys for Tots program in 1948 and expanded the efforts nationwide.

As for this, the 60th anniversary of that original toy drive, Jones said, "The next big step is starting to do different things as far as toy collection and keeping the word out there."

For more information about the Toys for Tots program, call Jones at 450-6698.