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### BROWARD COUNTY NEWS

# Pompano High, Broward Sheriff's Office make giving toys a team effort

By Scott Luxor  
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Pompano Elementary School student Tristan Nunez, middle, gives appreciation to Pompano High student volunteer Viviana Morales and a Broward Sheriff's Office deputy during the gift-giving event. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

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Pompano Beach High School, led by teacher Rick Nagy, recently teamed up with the Broward Sheriff's Office in a spirited competition to see who could collect a



many clothes and toys as possible for younger students at Pompano Beach Elementary School next door. They also collected the same items for the local office of Broward Partnership, which helps those experiencing homelessness.



Santa waves at the Pompano High school student volunteers as he comes to help distribute gifts to the elementary students in need. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

The initiative came about from an idea that was generated from Operation Establish Trust, a community group that gets together regularly to discuss what can be done to establish better relations between the Broward Sheriff's Office and the community. The group consists of police officers, teachers and residents and was co-founded by Nagy, along with Col. Gregory Johnson of the JROTC program at Pompano High.

Last year, the group had a similar competition a food drive competition for Broward Partnership. This year, Nagy said they wanted to expand their offerings to clothes and toys for kids at Christmas who may be homeless or part of a family struggling to make ends meet.





Broward Sheriff's Office deputies wait in line to hand out gifts to students in need. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

This year, the participants in the group decided that they didn't need to look any further than the elementary school next door. Nagy said he asked Principal Shezette Small to have her teachers and counselors identify students in need.

### **Leader of the pack**

Nagy is the leader in the team effort to bring happiness to youth in need in Pompano.

“The whole event took a month of planning with the Broward Sheriff's Office,” he said. “I meet with them on a weekly basis and we discuss what we can do to establish better relations between the BSO and the local community. The clothing and toy drive came up as one of those ideas.”

The idea of making the event a friendly competition between the students and police was to encourage positive interaction between kids and law enforcement, Nagy said.





Teacher Rick Nagy talks with Pompano High volunteers before the gifts get distributed to the students in need at Pompano Elementary. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

“It shows the students that there’s a lot more to the BSO than just enforcing the law. And we make it a fun contest,” he said.

Nagy said it wasn’t hard to identify children in need.

“We thought we would see how many of those kids were in need, whether they were homeless, or below the poverty line,” he said. “I got a list of 77 kids from their principal, and we ended up giving two toys to each of those kids.”

During the event, the officers approached the school in the morning in a long line of vehicles as a show of their unified force to help those in need. As the cars approached the school, the students who were going to receive the gifts began cheering with excitement.



Denise Garcia, of the Broward Sheriff's Office, sports a Santa hat while taking photos of the event. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

Once the officers arrived at the scene, they got out of their vehicles led by Santa. Along with the officers, he got huge shouts of happiness from the crowd. The officers then worked with the high school student volunteers in handing out the clothes and gifts to the students. The officers were clearly moved by the excitement of the little ones who got their gifts.

“The BSO really enjoyed the event,” Nagy said, smiling. “They love being around the kids, and they empathize with the whole purpose behind it as well.”

Deputy Aaron Moore, an officer with the Broward Sheriff's Office Neighborhood Support Team, was all on board with the effort.

“It was a great event that focused entirely on working with and helping the youth in our community,” he said. “We know that during the holidays there are lots of people are impacted and affected in many ways. The BSO truly enjoyed being a vessel of service making this holiday season memorable for so many who can't on their own.”





Officers David Franks, left, and Aaron Moore load up boxes of donated goods onto a truck to be donated to Broward Partnership to help homeless and other families in need for the holidays. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

The students who got involved with the drive did it out of a passion to make a difference, since Nagy doesn't offer any school incentives to get involved.

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“It matters to me that our students understand what it's like to be involved in [helping the community](#),” he said. “I don't give them extra credit or extra service hours. I simply offer them the chance to help somebody, and that's the whole thing. Because in the long run, the students learn about the cause and about giving, rather than just getting a pat on the back.”

### **Student profile: Ally Vagelos**

Ally Vagelos is a senior at Pompano High School. She also serves as president of the [Make Our Schools Safe](#) student organization.



Pompano High student volunteer Ally Vagelos, left, poses with elementary student Gabriela Hernandez who just received a big blue teddy bear for a gift. Sofia Ramirez, right, another student volunteer, helps out with the oversized bear. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

“Mr. Nagy brought me the idea of the clothing and toy drive that he did last year,” she said. “He asked us if we wanted to get involved this year in a similar effort. It was really engaging, because we ended up working with different organizations to help make this happen.”

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Vagelos said that she was amazed at the event.





Pompano student volunteers applaud as the Broward Sheriff's Office deputies and Santa drive up to the school to help distribute the clothing and toys to students in need at Pompano Elementary. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

“I’ve been here for four years, and this was definitely the most heartwarming event I’ve ever seen at Pompano High School,” she said. “It was amazing. I’ve never seen anything like it. Seeing all the children really helped to put a face on who you’re giving a gift to. It felt different than just giving to an organization. And it’s nice to know how many children were actually touched with this effort.”

### **Student profile: Cali Berrios**

Cali Berrios is a freshman at Pompano Beach High School. She’s new to the volunteering scene there.

“As a freshman, this is the first time I’ve invested my time into something so big and so heartwarming. It was a great first experience at the school.

“As student volunteers, we’re just so amazed at how this turned out,” she said. “These cute little kids happen to be underprivileged and it was so great seeing them receive the gifts. It’s as amazing for us to experience giving these gifts, as I’m sure it is for them to receive them.”





Cali Berrios was one of the Pompano High student volunteers at the event. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)



Pompano High volunteer India Miller moves boxes of clothes to the distribution area outside the school. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

### **Student profile: Meera Ghanem**

Meera Ghanem is a freshman at Pompano High School. She is in the Student Government Association. Ghanem got involved in the project as soon as she he



about it. She said she gets involved with many events in and out of school.

“We’ve been working on this project for a couple of months,” she said. “With the clothing and toy drive, we wanted to make some kids happier for the holidays, since the don’t have all the opportunities that we have. We got the whole school to



donate as many clothes and toys as they could to bring a smile to another child’s face.”

Meera Ghanem was one of the Pompano High student volunteers at the event. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)



Pompano High volunteer Melanie Cia helps arrange gifts outside the school that will be distributed to young students in need at Pompano Elementary. (Scott Luxor / Contributor)

