Early Christmas

Keiser collects toys for military families

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DAYTONA BEACH — Christmas came early for 3-year-olds Rasheem Williams and William Norman Jr. as they collected small cars and candy canes from Santa Claus on Wednesday afternoon, helping kick off a toy drive at Keiser University, where their moms attend classes.

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It wasn't long before Rasheem and William were on their knees, playing with their new cars as Keiser campus president Matt McEnany and local politicians talked about the need to share the holiday spirit this season.

"I get excited anytime we do things for families and children," Daytona Beach Mayor Derrick Henry told a small crowd of mostly Keiser students and staff. "This is what this season is about, putting others before yourself."

The toy drive at Keiser campuses around Florida will continue through Dec. 13 to benefit Operation Homefront. Anyone who wants to participate can drop off new, unwrapped toys at Keiser's Daytona Beach campus, 1800 Business Park Blvd.

The nonprofit organization based in San Antonio, Texas, was established in early 2002 to support families of deployed military men and women in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. It now benefits American military personnel and/or their families who have unmet needs due to financial hardship, death, injury or physical or mental conditions related to service in Iraq or Afghanistan.

With more than 20 percent of Keiser students active duty service members, veterans or military family members, the school collected more than $15,000 worth of toys in Florida last Christmas season for those families, McEnany said Wednesday.

Medical assisting student Ebony Calhoun of Daytona Beach — Rasheem's mother — said she's glad to see the university supporting Operation Homefront through the toy drive.

"Everyone needs help now and then," Calhoun said. "You never know when you might need help."