



Photos by Mike McCollum

More than 2,000 youngsters and their parents converged on video store in hopes of receiving one of the toys being given away in a radio station-sponsored event.

# Toy giveaway overwhelmed

DEC 22 1993

Huge turnout wipes out stock, leaves kids disappointed

By JUDY BRILL  
STAFF WRITER

A Christmas toy giveaway meant to attract a few hundred people mushroomed into a mob scene yesterday afternoon as more than 2,000 hopefuls converged on a small video store in downtown Watsonville.

Lured by the promise of a free toy, families with little or nothing to spare for gifts this holiday waited on line for hours outside Beach Street Video. The surprisingly large turnout left event sponsors understocked and some disappointed with their gift.

Traffic control from the Watsonville Police Department was hastily called to keep the crowd — almost exclusively Latino, and mostly women and children — on the sidewalk and out of harm's

way. Two lines, three and four people deep, stretched down East Beach in two directions, around the end of Alexander Street and west around to Main.

Sponsored by radio station KKLF — *La Doble K* — and Salinas businessman Ricky Cabrera, the offer of free toys for needy children had been hawked on the air for several days. A similar giveaway earlier in the day at *Exitos Latinos* in Salinas had attracted about 1,000, an obviously frazzled and concerned Cabrera said.

"We wanted to do something good; we don't want it to turn into something bad," said Cabrera, who owns Jaripeo's, a promotion company that puts on dances, concerts and rodeos in Salinas and Watsonville.



Erbe Gonzales, 2, waits by box of toys as his mother helps with distribution.

See TOYS page 3 ►

## TOYS

► From Page 1

Station manager Jose M. Diaz did his best to hold the lines until the giveaway, scheduled to start at 1 p.m., began almost an hour late.

Cabrera was also worried that a lot of the people, some of whom had been waiting since 9 a.m., would go home empty-handed. He said between 200 and 300 people had been expected, but 1,000 toys had been brought just in case. He said he hoped another 1,000 candy canes would appease the toyless.

"Our best intention was to bring toys for everyone," Cabrera said. "We're sorry if some are disappointed. We just never expected this turnout."

After being alerted to the situation, several traffic officers began warning people that they would be cited if they didn't stay out of the street. Watching as children, young and old, continued to dart in and out of the street, Sgt. Ben Tumbaga said his main concern was that someone was going to get run over. Police quickly decided to close one lane to traffic altogether.

Tumbaga said the department had not been notified of the giveaway, and took Cabrera aside, telling him that a permit should have been obtained and that a private security company might have been considered, given the size of the crowd.

But Cabrera explained he had

so many people.

DEC 22 1993

"We asked please, please, only people who really can't afford a toy to come," he said, adding that the turnout spoke of the great "Hispanic numbers and interest in Watsonville. What is it going to mean for the future?"

Cabrera also said he suspected that a portion of the crowd really could afford to buy their own toys. "They're not playing fair," he said.

Some on the line agreed. Rosa Salgado, who had brought one child for a toy, didn't like the fact that some late arrivals were pushing right into the video store, while she and others had been patiently waiting. "People shouldn't cut ahead," she said. "I'm going to be real upset" if there are no toys left.

Others were more resigned to the situation. One woman, who

had been in line since 12:30, said that if they ran out of toys, "I'll go home — what else? I can't do anything about it."

As the main stock of toys disappeared, necessity gave birth to invention, and Cabrera began tearing open bags of little toy cars, each meant for a child, and instead meted out the individual cars as gifts.

A little more than an hour after the giveaway started, the crowd began to disperse. Some children had toys, some had candy canes, and some were disappointed with their more modest take. But the Police Department reported that no child went home with nothing.

He thanked the businesses who had supported the event, and was especially grateful to the police "for their help and cooperation."