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# Programs for needy try to do more with less

By Terri Morgan  
Special to the Mercury News

Volunteer organizations in Santa Cruz County are receiving shrinking donations and are struggling to help make the holidays merry for thousands of families.

"We're down in cash donations about \$8,000 from last year," said Annette Marcum, volunteer director of the 10th Annual Valley Christmas Project. At the same time, she estimates the Ben Lomond-based group will be trying to serve about 40 percent more people.

"Donations are coming in smaller amounts," Marcum said. "A lot of our donors are middle-income people who have been hurt by the recession and layoffs."

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— Annette Marcum, Valley Christmas Project director

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Other holiday programs in the county feel the pinch, too. Donations to the Second Harvest Food Bank are down 40 percent while its needs are up 70 percent, said Barbara Anderson, holiday project coordinator for the Santa Cruz Volunteer Center.

"It's similar everywhere," Anderson said. "Cash donations are down because people aren't able to give as much."

Donations are used to provide

less-fortunate families in the San Lorenzo Valley, Bonny Doon, Scotts Valley and the Summit area with Christmas dinner fixings. Also needed are clothing, especially sweat shirts and pants for teen-agers; gifts for infants; and presents for elderly shut-ins, Marcum said.

The Valley Christmas Project coordinates the efforts of individuals, schools, churches and service clubs. Last year, the group reached 4,700 people, including infants, the elderly, families, homeless men

and women, and teen-agers in juvenile hall and the California Youth Authority camp.

"We gear our Christmas project to giving hope and spirit to children and families," Marcum said. Noting that the organization's recent Thanksgiving project served 525 families, up from 287 last year, Marcum said she expects a comparable increase in the number of needy families served this Christmas.

The Volunteer Center, which

helps coordinate many of the holiday programs in the midcounty so they can share resources and prevent duplication of efforts, also is seeking cash donations. The money will be used to buy food and to provide motel vouchers for homeless families. The center also needs people to adopt a family to which to donate Christmas dinner and gifts.

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## IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Valley Christmas Project will accept requests until Friday from families in need. The group can be reached at (408) 336-5651. The Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County can be contacted at (408) 423-0554. Donations can be mailed to the center's holiday project at 1110 Emeline Ave., Building I, Santa Cruz 95060.