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Seniors collect suitcases for foster children

In Ventura, Cypress Place hosts drive

By Anne Kallas
Special to The Star

Suitcases for local foster children — a place where they can store a favorite toy or blanket and use instead of a plastic bag if they need to move suddenly — are being collected by a local senior living center.

“I got the idea from a doctor who was a foster parent,” explained Yvonne Knepper, a marketing director at Cypress Place Senior Living in Ventura. “So many of the children have to pack their belongings in boxes or trash bags. Their lives are worth more than that.”

So through Oct. 16, the facility is holding a suitcase drive, where people can drop off gently used suitcases to be given to foster children as the holiday season approaches.



Frank Donahue (from left), Jim Barrett and Celia Valentine sit in front of a row of classic cars at the classic car show and 1970s party Wednesday to kick off a suitcase collection project at Cypress Place Senior Living in Ventura.

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The drive kicked off Wednesday when Cypress Place opened its doors to both classic cars and the public. The event had a decidedly 1970s theme, with

small disco ball necklaces as party favors, disco music and Philly steak sandwiches complete with Cheese Whiz prepared by Cypress Place Chef

Anthony Krzywicki.

Knepper said the last time Cypress Place collected suitcases, more than 1,200 were donated.

Cynthia Hutchison,

foster home recruitment and support specialist for the Ventura County Human Services Agency

See SUITCASES, 4A

SUITCASES from 3A

Children and Family Services, said that suitcases allow a small measure of dignity for the approximately 1,000 children in the county's foster care system.

"Their families are truly in crisis. Something has happened and there is a situation requiring a safe place for the child to stay," said Hutchison, explaining that the goal is always to reunite a family whenever possible. "The suitcases — it's something that is theirs permanently, where they can store their belongings that are meaningful for them."

Community events that raise awareness of children in foster care are always welcome, she said.

"We're really grateful," Hutchison said. "This is a wonderful sweet gesture. The teenagers especially are going to love the suitcases."

According to Cypress Place Community Marketing Director Mike Macke, the suitcases will be given out during a big party where children can also enjoy a visit with Santa, portrayed by Cypress Place resident Richard



PHOTOS BY TROY HARVEY/SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Cypress Place Community Marketing Director Mike Macke talks with resident Bernice Marpel during a classic car show and 1970s party Wednesday to kick off a suitcase collection project.

Goodman.

Goodman said he's been portraying Santa for 35 years, during which time he's gone from wearing a fake beard to growing his own facial hair into a long white year-round accessory.

He said the most common wish he hears from foster children — from youngsters to teens — is "a permanent home."

"It's heartbreaking," he said.

For Wednesday's event, Gary and Betsy Lewis of Ventura brought their 1959 red Corvette convertible to Cypress Place. Gary Lewis said the car is popular when the couple rides around the streets of Ventura.

"We get a lot of thumbs-up," he said. "I bought it in 1980 and it's been a lot of fun."

The pillars and entryway of Cypress Place

were decorated with colorful paper flowers made by Joyce Ward and others, all of whom carried orange parasols at the car show.

"It's important to the community to realize there are a lot of things going on here," Ward said.

For information about the suitcase project and Cypress Place, call 650-8000 or go online to <http://cypressplaceseniorliving.com>.