

# THE DAILY ADVERTISER

Wednesday, December 26, 2007

theadvertiser.com

50 cents

Acadiana Outreach Center • In Focus

## Season celebrated with charity

Local needy get extra helpings of holiday spirit

Kyle Jackson  
kjackson@theadvertiser.com

It was truly a day of giving at the Acadiana Outreach Center on Christmas morning as hundreds of people gathered together for a holiday lunch prepared by a local eatery.

The annual AOC Christmas Celebration was held Tuesday morning, with more than 100 local volunteers giving their time and energy to serve food to those individuals less fortunate.

AOC officials said the celebration has occurred for more than 10 years for those less fortunate.

Aside from a meal consisting of pork roast, rice dressing, sweet potatoes, glazed ham and a wide assortment of cookies, cakes and other rich desserts, the children were treated to a large variety of toys. Children were allowed to take five toys each, choosing from a mountain of toys at the Outreach center.

By noon, officials with AOC said several hundred individuals had passed through the center to eat lunch.

"I think it's great," said Jesse Guidry, spokesman for AOC. "It's great that we can get these people off the streets and feed them. The best part is that our volunteers are not only fixing the meals, but they're also serving it to them, bringing the food to their table. That's fantastic because a lot of these people probably haven't been served a meal ever."

"It's restaurant-style," said

### SEE MORE

View more photos from the Christmas dinner at the Acadiana Outreach Center at [theadvertiser.com](http://theadvertiser.com).



Sandi Degeyter, an employee of the AOC. "They get their food brought to them and they don't have to get up for anything."

Madonna Broussard, owner of Laura's II restaurant on North University Avenue who catered the event, said her restaurant has provided their food for the last four years and enjoys participating in the celebration.

"This is just a way for us to give back and it's just another way for us to know how blessed we are," said Broussard.

John Menard, 33, was one of those eating lunch at the celebration. He came with his three kids, his sister Vickie and her three children also.

**"There's a lot of love bottled up in this place and they're sharing it. This whole thing is an expression of love."**

— Valerie Keller

"I'm grateful for everything this Christmas," he said. "I think Acadiana Outreach is doing a great thing to help out people in need."

Jill Laroussini has been a volunteer at the AOC for the past 15 years, and she said the event is the true embodiment of what Christmas is about.

"Christmas is about giving back and being grateful for what you have and all that we have to offer others," Laroussini said. "We have a lot to offer, thankfully."

Valerie Keller, CEO of the Outreach center, agreed.

"There's a lot of love bottled up in this place and they're sharing it," she said. "This whole thing is an expression of love." "This isn't about toys or food. Those are just physical representations of an expression of love."



Leslie Westbrook / lwestbrook@theadvertiser.com

Volunteers serve Christmas dinner and gifts Tuesday at the Acadiana Outreach Center.