

## *The Countdown Is On*

Monday began National Collection Week for Operation Christmas Child, and the countdown is on for what appears to be another banner year for Life Care Centers of America. All across the land, and especially in communities served by our facilities, caring people are rushing to stores in search of small treasures to pack into shoe box gifts for Operation Christmas Child.

But we have some big targets to hit if we are to exceed last year's totals. Because of the generosity of churches, schools, businesses, civic clubs and families – along with the creative genius and hard work of our associates – Life Care collected a whopping 252,854 shoe boxes in 2004. That was a substantial increase over the 2003 total of 217,363. Our goal this year is 300,000 – and I am convinced we are on track to meet it.

Locally, through Life Care's official collection center in Cleveland, Tennessee, we produced 55,072 shoe boxes last year, up from 35,437 in 2003. I expect us to go well beyond 100,000 boxes here.

Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse, the world relief organization that sponsors Operation Christmas Child, wrote us to say: "Thanks to the efforts of caring people like you, children in faraway places are experiencing God's love and the true meaning of Christmas through gift-filled shoe boxes. Millions of boys and girls around the world live in desperate circumstances as a result of disease, poverty, war or natural disaster. In 1993, Samaritan's Purse began collecting and distributing shoe boxes filled with small gifts for hurting children to bring them joy and hope. Since then, over 38 million shoe boxes containing toys, school supplies and candy have brightened the lives of children living in some 120 countries. More importantly, by offering gospel booklets and follow-up discipleship programs, young people and their families are introduced to the Good News of Jesus Christ, and many lives are changed for eternity.

"Such a massive effort is made possible by civic organizations, schools, businesses, churches and other groups throughout the United States and 10 other sending nations who fill the shoe boxes and deliver them to area drop-off locations. In addition, tens of thousands of volunteers donate their time in our six processing centers during the holiday season to prepare the boxes for overseas shipment."

Graham said the Samaritan's Purse goal this year is to collect 7.8 million shoe box gifts.

And nobody does shoe boxes better than Life Care Centers of America, according to officials of Samaritan's Purse. Although the organization has a

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number of national sponsors, Life Care leads the way in its commitment to the production of these gifts to children, they advise.

As we enter these final days of the drive, please call on your news media to help. You will find them to be very responsive and supportive. Public service announcements for radio were shipped to our facilities on July 22, along with space at the end of each for specific facility information.

And as you prepare your boxes for delivery to a collection center in your area, pray that they will bring love and hope to the hearts of the children who receive them.

--Beecher Hunter