

# Join ToyMakers of East Lake and Help Bring Smiles to Those Who Need Them Most!

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Children at the Ronald McDonald House in Gainesville play with ToyMakers' toys at the July 2015 Birthday Bash

The ToyMakers of East Lake are hard at work all year round, making beautiful toys for children by hand. Their goal is simple. To bring joy to a child, to see a smile spread across that little face, little pudgy hands grasping the wheels and watching them turn. They want to see older children race their car across the floor, or turn their therapy lesson into a game. Their only goal is to make a child happy, if only momentarily, while they're at the hospital, or at a shelter, and to remind them that everything is going to be okay. That's what children need to know when they're going through a scary time, and these volunteers help to create these moments, one

"Batmobile" or "Daisy Car" at a time.

Using materials that have been donated by volunteers, local companies, national companies and seemingly from heaven above, the ToyMakers of East Lake have delivered thousands of toys to children all over the Tampa Bay Area, and beyond. They deliver to All Children's Hospital,

Tampa General Hospital, Shand's Hospital in Gainesville, Shriner's Hospital in Tampa, Ronald McDonald Houses and more. This is the real deal, folks.



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Talented ToyMakers' volunteers, Wayne Gable and Caroline, teamed up to make some very cool toys like the Indy car (above).

Each toy is lovingly handcrafted by men and women who donate their talent and their time to make a toy that is almost as unique as the child who will receive it. Each car (or plane or animal) takes a minimum of an hour to make, and passes through a dozen helpful hands in the process before it is cleaned and bagged for delivery.

ToyMakers' president, Bob Helms, says, "Two of our most talented volunteers, Wayne Gable and his friend, Caroline, have teamed up to make some very cool toys, like Indy cars. They also make animated ducks and penguins as well as toy trucks that double as a business card holder.

While most of our hand-made, hand painted toys take over an hour to complete, it is the love

and care that goes into each one that makes them special. At some level we believe the kids sense this and appreciate getting something truly unique.”

Every inch of every toy is specifically designed for children in hospital environments, where soft toys are not an option (because they collect germs). Each little car is treated with such care to benefit little fingers, from the way each one is sanded to eliminate any rough edges, to the kind of paint the volunteers use (only Sherwin-Williams certified lead-free, of course).

As a volunteer, you can have the opportunity to go with the ToyMakers of East Lake when they are delivering their toys. While it's hard to see children in the hospital, confined to their beds or their wheelchairs, their little bodies wrapped in bandages, you'll see what the effect of one little toy can have on a child. It fills your cup to the tippy-top. It's that moment, when you see that smile, that you are reminded: While the world may be facing its challenges, there is still so much love and light in the world. You can be a part of that by becoming a volunteer at ToyMakers of East Lake.



**Bob Helms**

Yesterday at 12:00 AM · 

Today, members of the Toymakers of East Lake, Palm Harbor, Florida, agreed to repair and restore Santa's bench seats on the "antique" 1961 Fire Truck used at Christmas time by East Lake Fire and Rescue. During the holidays Santa invites neighborhood kids to climb aboard and receive toys and other gifts (secretly supplied by parents or Toymakers the day before), [www.toymakersofeastlake.org](http://www.toymakersofeastlake.org)



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Facebook Post

Bob says, “Due to ever increasing demand for our hand-made toys, we are seeking volunteers who are experienced in woodworking or those who are talented in detail painting.”

Becoming a Toymaker is easy! If you are able to devote a little time and energy, you can become a part of this incredible organization. Everyone can help in some way. Volunteers range in age from 13 to 103, in fact, one of the volunteers of ToyMakers is a World War II Veteran named Thad Pollard, who says, “The meaning comes when we deliver them. To see the reaction of the kids.”

If you can learn how to use a saw, you can help cut out the cars! They start with a template; it’s a lot like woodshop class used to be! If you can paint, you can help give each car its unique personality. ToyMakers of East Lake needs volunteers who can add wheels, or simply individually bag each car. The truth is, everyone can help. Bob says, “Pam Pearch, Pauline Hendrick, Susan Hetheron and several other talented volunteers, hand paint toys to help bring a smile to a child in need or distress.”

Always growing and expanding, ToyMakers of East Lake recently completed an addition for a new workroom, new porch, and a shipping container that expands space for volunteers. Bob says, “Volunteers Jamie Gillespie, Joe McCoy and Buck Reuter did most of the work. The new space will house three router stations, two drill presses and a large dust collection system. The porch will be an outdoor work space for volunteers.” He adds, “ToyMakers of East Lake is in a constant state of growth and expansion that I affectionately call ‘strategic disruption.’ Since 2007, when East Lake United Methodist Church first donated use of the workshop building, we have been continuously improving our space and processes. ToyMakers is one of several community outreach programs of ELUMC along with Young Days Preschool.”

As a completely nonprofit organization, ToyMakers of East Lake hosts an Open House and Silent Auction each year to raise awareness and funds for the organization. Open House includes a tour of the facility, which is normally closed to the public, and an opportunity for the children in attendance to race and play with some of the handmade cars! Each year, the silent auction includes tickets to attractions, local businesses and a number of beautiful, handmade gifts to win! This year’s ToyMakers of East Lake Open House and Silent Auction will be held on Saturday, November 5th, 2016! Mark your calendars, for it’s a wonderful opportunity to support a wonderful cause and do some holiday shopping!





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Current Vice President, Janet Helms

Julie said, “I’ve taken my children to this event for the last two years, and we love it. Last year, I won the silent auction for a helicopter ride with the Pinellas County Sherriff’s Office, and I gave it to my husband for Christmas. He had the most amazing time!”

Speaking of the holidays, recently ToyMakers of East Lake donated their talent and their time to help repair Santa’s bench seats on the East Lake Fire Department’s antique 1961 fire truck. Each Christmas, Santa partners up with East Lake Fire & Rescue to deliver presents and cheer all over town.


If you can’t volunteer, you can still make a difference by supporting ToyMakers of East Lake’s cause, donating supplies, or by contributing! Bob shared with us that, “Recently donated for our kids were 69 colorful spinning tops made by Ron Bowser and the South Florida Woodturners Guild. Ron contacted me with an offer to make some tops after seeing ToyMakers of East Lake on Fox & Friends with Elizabeth Hasselbeck last December. Here is one spinning beautifully after a quick twist of the handle (he demonstrated). We plan to deliver them to pediatric hospitals and set up spin competitions for the older kids.”

Becoming a ToyMaker means making friends, having fun and making a difference. If you’re looking for some cheer, you don’t have to wait for the holidays! Be the good in the world, and help bring a smile to a child all year round by becoming a part of ToyMakers of East Lake!

**The ToyMakers of East Lake’s Workshop is at 2690 Tanglewood Trail in Palm Harbor, behind East Lake United Methodist Church. If you would like to donate, sponsor or volunteer, please log on to [toymakersofeastlake.org](http://toymakersofeastlake.org) (<http://toymakersofeastlake.org>), or email [toys@toymakersofeastlake.org](mailto:toys@toymakersofeastlake.org). Find ToyMakers of East Lake on Facebook and Twitter!**



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