

LAND O' LAKES • LUTZ • ODESSA

# TAMPA BAY NEWS

*Your community. Your magazine.®*

& Lifestyles

<http://lol.nnlflorida.com>

Lutz/Land O' Lakes/Odessa Issue 12-16

## ToyMakers Make Handmade Toys for Children Who Could Use A Smile!

Published on 14 December 2016 in [Events \(/en/lolo\\_12\\_16/events/\)](#)

[Julie Kanehl](#) (author)



This little boy caught a ride on the antique fire truck at the Toymaker's of East Lake auction in November

What would you do to bring joy to a child? One who is scared, hurt, sick or lost? It may seem hard to believe, but right here in the Tampa Bay Area, there are children in hospitals, orphanages and situations where smiles don't come very easily. In fact, the volunteers at Toy Makers of East Lake have given away more than 13,000 handcrafted wooden toys and cars in 2016 alone! Volunteers give many of the toys directly to children in Tampa Bay Area hospitals, while others are donated to organizations and first responders with the goal of giving a smile to the children who need one most. It may seem like a simple gesture, a handmade car to a child, but a toy like this is far more than a carved piece of wood, painted tires that spin, and a splash of paint. These cars remind children to hope, to dream, and to laugh.

Toy Makers of East Lake is a non-profit organization made up of men and women like me and you who donate a few hours a week to create toys that are safe enough for little fingers, clean enough for hospital environments, and fast enough to make a child giggle with glee. Famous for their "Batmobiles" and "Daisy Racers" they make wooden toys of all kinds. Their reward? A simple smile.

I'll Trade You a Toy For a Smile! There's just something special about these toys and cars. You can't buy cars like these at the store. These cars are sturdy and well made, solid and fast. Frankly, they put the cars at the store to shame. Perhaps they don't have the bells and whistles... They don't link up to your phone via Blue-tooth or take pictures at 30 feet up, but they have something that children crave: They're handmade with love. They also make walking toys (a penguin and a duck). Little ones love to walk them around, and for kids in the hospital, these walking toys are a huge success, for if you ask a child to do their therapy- forget it, but if you tell them they're allowed to walk their penguin down the hall, they're out of there and doing their therapy without realizing it.

One volunteer said, "I recently had the opportunity to help distribute toys at Tampa General Hospital, and it was truly a humbling experience. To see kids of all ages, backgrounds and situations smile when they received a car was amazing. In those moments sick toddlers forgot

about their illnesses and their limitations, and teenagers put down their phones in grateful anticipation. It was pretty darn cool.” Located in Palm Harbor, Toy-Makers of East Lake has a workshop that began as little more than a shed filled with donated tools, saws and supplies. Today, the Toy Makers workshop is one that Santa’s elves might be proud of. Over the years, the workshop has grown due to donations from the public, from their volunteers, and through their annual Toy Makers of East Lake Open House and Silent Auction, which is held each November.

At the most recent Toy Makers of East Lake Open House and Silent Auction, the East Lake Fire Department was on hand to take children and families on a ride in their antique fire truck! The Toy Makers have helped to restore the benches on the antique fire truck, which is a good thing, as Santa himself brings toys and tidings of good cheer to little ones all over town! Inside, the auction was a huge success, as the public came out to support a great cause and to do some shopping! The silent auction featured hundreds of items, including hand-made toys, gift cards to local restaurants, tickets to local museums and theme parks, and one-of-a-kind works of art. There was a beautiful buffet, opportunities to tour the workshop, and for the children, a place to race their brand new cars, as the Toy Makers of East Lake were kind enough to give free cars to the children in attendance.

Chris said, “We love going to visit the ToyMakers of East Lake every year!”

## **Become a Volunteer and Bring Joy to a Child!**



(/get\_img?ImageId=7832)

**Volunteers are enjoying the colorful new workroom at ToyMakers**

It seems that everyone who sees the simplicity and the sincerity of this charity wants to be involved. A few days a week, volunteers of all ages and talents come together to make the toys that will eventually be delivered to children all over Tampa Bay and beyond. Their handmade toys have been delivered across the U.S. and as far as Haiti through mission trips, so

it's safe to say that this small charity, an Out- reach Mission of East Lake United Methodist Church, is having an effect on children all over the world. This holiday season, the CSX Corporation will be handing out more than 500 ToyMakers of East Lake toys from their famous Santa Train, which has run through the Appalachians for the past 70 years, giving supplies, food, clothing, and toys to the people who live there.

Current ToyMakers of East Lake President and longtime volunteer, Bob Helms, stated, "We feel very honored that CSX would request our toys to be distributed on their Santa Train. Seeing as how they only distribute about 5000 toys, 10% of the toys they give out will be from our workshop. We're pretty excited about that."

If you'd like to support this amazing charity, please consider donating your time! ToyMakers of East Lake is always looking for volunteers to cut out the patterns, sand the toys, paint the wheels, even to simply bag up the toys and count them for distribution. You certainly don't have to be a carpenter to help build toys at ToyMakers of East Lake! Volunteers of all ages and talents are appreciated, and Toy- Makers is happy to work with students who need volunteer hours through Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program.

You may find that when you join Toy Makers of East Lake, you'll find yourself surrounded by new friends, and a renewed sense of wonder in the good workings of the world. That's what happens when you work for a good cause, it renews your spirit and your faith.

**The ToyMakers of East Lake have a workshop, and it is located at 2690 Tanglewood Trail in Palm Harbor, FL 34685, behind the East Lake United Methodist Church.**

If you would like to donate, sponsor or volunteer, visit the website, [www.toymakersofeastlake.org](http://www.toymakersofeastlake.org) (<http://www.toymakersofeastlake.org>) or you may email them [attoys@toymakersofeastlake.org](mailto:attoys@toymakersofeastlake.org)



Tweet



Sign Up to see what your friends like.