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Lebanon prisoners raise \$7,000 for toys

BY AMBER ELLIS • AELLIS@ENQUIRER.COM • DECEMBER 16, 2009

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LEBANON – In a small room, away from the commotion of prisoners breaking for their noon meal, Barbie dolls, teddy bears and other toys topped tables and spilled onto the floor Wednesday.



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The Enquirer/Cara Owsley
Lemar Goss, left, and Charles Courtney Jr., both prisoners at Lebanon Correctional Institution, box toys that were bought with funds the inmates raised for the Butler/Warren County U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots Program.



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George Esposito, a Vietnam veteran and an inmate at Lebanon Correctional Institution, hands toys to Marine Sgt. Joshua Kesterson. The toys were bought using funds the inmates raised. Inmates in the Vietnam Veterans of America, The African Cultural Organization and the American Red Cross CRP group raised \$7,500. The staff at the LeCI bought the toys.



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The Enquirer/Cara Owsley
Owen Hobbs, an inmate at Lebanon Correctional Institution, carries toys that were bought by inmates. They raised \$7,500 through selling pizza and pies, and other fundraisers.



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Money for the toys, a total of \$7,000, came from prisoners at the Lebanon Correctional Institution.

They scraped together money to buy discounted pizza, doughnuts, fresh vegetables and hoagies – goodies they don't normally receive – and sold them to fellow prisoners to raise the funds.

“It’s amazing to see what an inmate, a convict, can do to help the community,” said RasTesfa Fowler, a 22-year-old from Avondale. He’s serving 23 years for involuntary manslaughter, aggravated robbery and kidnapping. “To see these toys, it feels good to do something positive for a change.”

The toys – an unusual sight at the institution – will soon be delivered to their new owners: underprivileged children waiting for what might be their only gifts of the season.

Dozens of board games, princess crowns, basketballs and the like left the prison in 63 boxes Wednesday afternoon, headed for the Butler-Warren Toys for Tots office.

Now in its second year, the effort by the prison’s Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 592, the African Cultural Organization and the American Red Cross CPR group, topped last year’s goal by \$1,300.

Prison employees picked out the presents and

donated \$750 worth of toys.

The donation comes at a time when charitable organizations across the country are seeing more people who need help and fewer donors able to give.

At Butler-Warren Toys for Tots, the number of toys collected this year won’t come close to the 25,000 or so toys they had last year.

