



# ToyMakers of East Lake

*"Making Smiles One Toy at a Time"*



## Toy Stories

*Spring 2018 by Dan Pearch*

It often surprises people to learn just how many children in our communities are homeless, poor or receiving long term critical care. While we did not reach all of them, we were able to bring smiles to over 18,000 kids in stressful situations last year.

The ToyMakers of East Lake reach out to the surrounding communities in a number of different ways. The most notable is by providing toys to children who are at a painful or distressed point in their lives. Another is by showing adults, young adults, and even grade school children, the joy to be found in volunteering and the joy of giving to others.

Recently, one of our ToyMakers, Jeff Hilke, was asked to speak at his daughter's 5<sup>th</sup> grade class for "The Great American Teach-In". While most of the invited speakers talked about interesting professions or unusual careers, Jeff told the story of ToyMakers of East Lake. He took in samples of the toys we make, plus some "progressions", which illustrated the 36 separate steps each toy goes through from raw wood to a brightly painted keepsake. But the underlying aim of his presentation was to instill the sense of joy that can come from easing someone *else's* burden. Especially that of a child! The point was stated so well in a Thank You letter from "Mia", one of the children in the class, "Thank you for showing us a way to help others. You taught us that helping others can make you feel good."

### Partner Profile: Ronald McDonald House Charities



Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
North Central Florida



One of our recipient agencies is the Ronald McDonald House in Gainesville, FL, which operates a 31 guestroom house, with full facilities, plus separately a Family Room within UF Health Shands Children's Hospital. The Ronald McDonald House provides a home-like setting for families who need to be near hospitalized children, but also a setting for families with children receiving out-patient treatment, such as chemotherapy and dialysis. Our toys are presented to these young patients by parents and siblings. An ample inventory of the toys is also maintained at both locations for the entertainment of siblings, who must endure weeks, and sometimes months, away from their family homes.

Theresa Drews, Director of House Operations & Programs, tells us that some of the most popular toys are the emergency vehicles; the ambulance, the medical helicopter, and the police car. One of their patients, "Antonio", has been with them for almost a year, awaiting a heart transplant. His Mother says he cherishes his collection of our emergency vehicles!

The ToyMakers of East Lake and the Ronald McDonald House Charities share a common goal; to lessen the strain on families, and child patients, during a time that can be extremely stressful and frightening.

Please visit our website [www.toymakersofeastlake.org](http://www.toymakersofeastlake.org) to explore volunteer opportunities and other ways you can participate in: "Bringing Smiles One Toy at a Time".

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