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OHA spreads holiday joy to public housing residents

Dozens of eager children waited patiently to come into the doors of Washington Manor this week to see Santa Claus and experience the magic of the holidays at the Orange Housing Authority's seventh annual Christmas celebration.

Nearly 100 residents attended the event Thursday evening. The children, ranging from ages 2 to 12 years old, received board games, dolls, action figures, books and face-painting, while most families received a ShopRite gift card. Best of all, the children were able to take a photo with Santa Claus to capture the night's memory.

This year was especially significant for one family that was displaced after their apartment was deemed unsafe for habitability in October. In that time, the family of five had to move out and double up with relatives in a small unit, sleeping on the couch and making pallets on the floor.

They were in the process of being qualified for a Section 8 voucher when the Orange Housing Authority caught wind of their story.

"It broke our hearts to hear about their story and the condition they were living in," said Walter D. McNeil, executive director of the Orange Housing Authority. "We immediately partnered with Orange Housing Development Corporation to find a home suitable for the family so they could have a home during the holiday season. It was great to see their smiling faces as they attended their first annual holiday celebration with us."

The Housing Authority's annual event was made possible through donations from the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, the Alpert Group, RPM Development, Goldberg Realty, JS Management, LLC, Village Supermarkets and McDonald's Corporation. Despite economic times, ShopRite of East Orange donated gift cards, in addition to Verizon's New Vision Pioneers, which contributed scarves and hats to families.

The Orange Housing Authority provides quality and affordable housing for low-and-moderate income families. The rather small agency is having a major impact in the East Ward. The Orange Housing Authority offers 250 residences, 642 "Section 8" vouchers, 114 tax credit units and is constructing 42 more. The public agency is committed to improving the community by buying properties, improving their worth and stabilizing streets and neighborhoods.



Santa sits with children in front of a Christmas tree, holding presents donated through the Orange Housing Authority from Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, the Alpert Group, RPM Development, Goldberg Realty, JS Management, LLC, Village Supermarkets and McDonald's Corporation. ShopRite of East Orange donated gift cards, in addition to Verizon's New Vision Pioneers, which contributed scarves and hats to families.