

17TH BRIGADE

STARFLEET MARINE CORPS



HOW TO START AND CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL DRIVE

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So, you want to get involved in collecting toys to be given to the USMC-R's Toys for Tots program in your local area, but you have no idea how to proceed and get started. It's simple really and I'll show you how to do it in a few easy steps.

Things you should know before you start:

1. The Toys for Tots annual collection drives start on or about October 15 of each year and run until about mid-December.
2. You will need to setup a location and date(s) to collect the toys at ahead of time. My unit uses a local Wal-Mart which is very accommodating. They have no problem letting us use their parking lot/sidewalk area to set up a table with some basic information about us as well as signs and posters we get from the local Toys for Tots Coordinator. Where ever you choose, make sure it is a busy retail location with a good toy selection in a variety of price ranges.
3. The date(s) you pick for your drive(s) are important. You should pick busy shopping days to maximize the number of people and possible donations you can obtain. My unit does 3 drives every year on consecutive weekends. The first weekend starts on Black Friday (day after Thanksgiving) and there are hundreds (if not thousands) of people out shopping. Of course, we also start early (7 a.m. on Fri./Sat. and about 8-9 a.m. on Sun.)

Now, you're ready to get things moving:

1. Go to www.toysfortots.org and follow the link to the "Contact Us" page. Once there, follow the link to "Find an Office" and select the state and other information necessary. This will show you the local Toys For Tots coordinator and their contact information, by clicking contact us.
2. Once you have the contact information, place a phone call to this person and identify yourself as the representative of a group of people who want to collect toys on behalf of the Toys For Tots Program and deliver them to be distributed. You can choose to identify yourself as SFMC members, STARFLEET Members, Science Fiction fans, whatever you choose to use, just remember to sound professional and be polite. My unit identifies ourselves as the local Star Trek and other science fiction fan group.
3. Ask the Coordinator if he can give you some posters, boxes and any other paraphernalia and items he has to use during the drive(s). They should be pretty accommodating and helpful as every extra toy you can collect helps them give kids in the area a better Christmas. They may actually arrange for a marine or two to stop by your drive to see how things are going and to hang around and chat for a few minutes, it all depends on your location, date(s) and time(s) as well as their own schedule of manning other toy collection points.
4. Make sure you have arranged with your Unit (and your Chapter) to have enough people there in uniform and or chapter/MSG shirts to man the table and collection point as well as answer questions about the Toys For Tots program (how to request toys, where the donations go, what kind of donations are needed, etc.) and your unit/chapter and STARFLEET/SFMC.
5. On the day(s) of the drive, set up your table and other information and begin collecting toys from patrons at the location you have chosen. Answer their questions politely and professionally, and point them to the websites, phone numbers, etc., where they can get more information.
6. After you complete the drive(s) contact your local Coordinator and ask where the toys can be dropped off. Some areas may actually arrange for some marines from the local reserve unit to come pick up the toys from you.

7. Repeat as often as you feel like doing this event. My unit has done it every year for 8 years running. The marines actually call us if we are late checking in with them to get posters and such for that year. To date we have collected about \$20,000 in toys.

Other useful factors to consider:

1. Contact other chapters and Marine units in your area. Hold a contest to see who can collect the most toys in a given time period or just hold a joint operation with members from all units/chapters in the area participating.

2. Contact other science fiction groups in the area (501st Legion, Romulans, Klingons, etc...) and ask them if they would like to join you for this endeavor. We have been working together with the local 501st Legion members (the Dewback Ridge Squad) for several years now. When they show up in their white armor, people really stop to take pictures, talk with us, and make donations. We saw a significant increase in donations when they started participating in our annual drives and it never gets old.

3. Make sure to keep track of who shows up and how long they are there as this event will earn them the Commandant's Campaign Award and could qualify them for the Community Service Award, the Joint Operations Award (if done with other non-STARFLEET/SFMC science fiction groups) and might earn your unit the Community Service streamer for your unit guidon.

4. Most of all, HAVE FUN! If you are having fun, despite the poor weather conditions you may have to face, the people will see it and stop by to chat (if only for a few minutes). When they do stop, you have the perfect chance to get them to donate to the cause and buy an extra toy while they are doing their own shopping. I hope this little guide assists you in getting your own Toys For Tots drives up and running. They are fun and rewarding. Especially when the US Marines have that surprised look on their face because a group of science fiction fans were able to collect more toys than they did during a weekend drive.

Remember it all starts with finding your local coordinator and a location willing to let you set up your collection point in front of their store. Even if you don't have a local Toys for Tots Coordinator, I am sure there are similar programs with the same goal and purpose as Toys for Tots in your local area. Find them, make contact and use the same procedures as outlined above.



