

# OPTIMIST CLUB OF WB

## Brightens Holiday for Local Children

By: Frank J. Borne, Jr.  
Editor



Lainey Verdin with Santa Claus



Parents and volunteers help children select toys



Jaden Hayes with Santa Claus

The gymnasium at Gretna Middle School on Gretna Boulevard became a veritable Christmas toyland on December 10 when the Optimist Club of the West Bank conducted its 16th Annual West Jefferson Doll and Toy give-away. More than 1,600 children up to age 10 received the item of their choice from a selection of toys that included games, wagons, bicycles and tricycles, dolls, etc.

Sheila Verdin, of Lafitte, brought her grandchildren, Lainey and Blaine Verdin. "This is really wonderful," she said. "The kids enjoy coming and being able to pick a toy."

Dana Hayes also was grateful for the effort. "This is a blessing for us because this year has been very rough," she said. "We appreciate everything."

"This is a tremendous effort for the community," said Louisiana State Representative Ricky Templet, whose office coordinates the event. "1,600 kids, who might not have otherwise received a toy this Christmas, will get something. Our volunteers are outstanding. We unloaded two 18-wheeler trucks last night and arranged all of the toys in a matter of a few hours."

In addition to volunteers from the Optimist Club, more than 60 high school students from Helen Cox, Thomas Jefferson, West Jefferson, Academy of Our Lady, and Archbishop Shaw were on hand to unload and arrange the toys, assist children and parents to select toys, and continually neaten the rows of toys.

Joe Toomy, who served as District 85 Representative prior to Templet, said, "We try to make this a really special event for all of the children who come through. Our volunteers continually re-arrange the toys so that each child has the same experience in selecting their toy," he said. "This is a great opportunity for our high school students, who leave with a better appreciation of the needs in our community." Tickets usually are distributed within days of their availability, and some parents line up more than 12 hours in advance with their children, Toomy said. "The reserve officers for the Gretna Police Department do an outstanding job for us," he said. "They help us maintain order and make this a pleasurable event for everyone."

On hand to greet kids were Ronald McDonald and Santa Claus, and Optimist Club volunteers also gave the youngsters goodie bags containing coloring books, gift certificates, and candy, while the David Crockett Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1 handed out fresh fruit.

Templet's administrative assistant, Toni-Lynn Black, works throughout the year in preparation for the event, coordinating as early as April purchasing toys and having them stored until the week of the give-away. "During hard times, kids don't understand why Santa Claus might not be able to come," she said. "This gives them a chance to meet Santa and pick out something they like." Black works diligently to provide a variety of

toys that will appeal to both boys and girls and different age groups. She indicates that bicycles and wagons, which are pre-assembled by Crockett fire department volunteers, are the hottest items.

To learn more about the Optimist Club of the West Bank and to join, consult its web site: [www.optimistwestbank.org](http://www.optimistwestbank.org). ✨

## Krewe of Alla NEWS

Herman Daigle, Jr., a longtime member of the Krewe of Alla, was recognized in December with the krewe's 2011 Dr. Henry A. LaRocca Award, which is presented annually at the club's Ladies' Night Out Lobster Dinner, to a member for distinguished service to the organization. Daigle is retired from Blaine Kern Artists and serves on Alla's board of directors.

### Daigle with Alla's 2012 Maharanee and Board of Directors



Left to right: Al Kaiser, secretary; Mossy Mueller; Tommy Schaff; J.R. Chiasson, sergeant-at-arms; Herman Daigle, Jr.; Christy Lawson, Alla's 80<sup>th</sup> Maharanee; Toni Reaves; John Beninate, II, captain; Courtney Barousse, treasurer; Al Robichaux, Jr., president; Les Falgout; & Frank Borne, Jr. ✨