

CHRISTMAS RIDE THE BROWARD LATIN CHAMBER GIVES AWAY 70 BICYCLES TO CHILDREN.

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

A smile on a child's face makes it all worthwhile. For José "Pepe" Lopez, the annual bicycle giveaway that his Latin Chamber of Commerce of Broward County sponsors is worth all of the effort and time.

"The first year, we gave away seven bicycles," he explained. "This year we raised enough money to give away 70, and next year we plan on giving away 100."

Lopes, who is president of the Hollywood-based chamber, began the program seven years ago to "give back to the community," said Terri Castellano, chairman of the Chamber and a Senior Vice President of Union Planters Bank in Fort Lauderdale. "As a chamber we are not only interested in business but in giving back to the community that supports our members."

"The Chamber's purpose is to support businesses in the community, both Hispanic and Anglo," Castellano explained. "We are a gateway between domestic companies in Broward County and Latin America."

Chamber members collect donations from businesses and individuals throughout Broward County and then purchase bicycles for needy children. Recipients are identified and recommended by various social service organizations including the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA and others.

Members have found local commercial enterprises very generous in giving to their bicycle drive. The organization buys the bicycles at a substantial discount, allowing it to increase the number of units it can give away.

Next year the Chamber hopes to be able to assemble each of the bikes that they give away. "This year the family has to take responsibility for the assembly, but by next Christmas, we want to raise enough money to assemble them," Castellano said. "Some of the kids have trouble getting them home unassembled."

"This is a good thing to do for the children," said Leo Meneses, a member of the Chamber and a Business Development Officer for Commercebank in Weston who has participated in the project every year since its inception. "It's for a good cause."

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