



# CITY OF REDDING

## POLICE DEPARTMENT

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## **PRESS RELEASE OPERATION BLUE BIRTHDAY**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2009

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The Redding Police Department has participated in "Operation Blue Santa" for over 18 years, with the idea of providing Christmas to families who otherwise would not be able to afford one. A few months ago, Alysha Barner (a SHASCOM dispatcher and wife of Corporal Brian Barner) presented the idea of "Operation Blue Birthday," asking if the Redding Police would be interested in sponsoring this program. It seemed like a very worthwhile project, and a local chapter of *Spouses Behind the Badge* was formed.

This group is composed of spouses who felt that since their husbands and wives work for the police department and community everyday, they felt they wanted to be part of giving back to the community, as well. Their mission for Operation Blue Birthday is to improve the spirits and strengthen the bond between children and law enforcement by delivering a special gift while the child is staying at a shelter on their birthday.

Operation Blue Birthday strives to ensure children from local shelters are remembered on their birthday. Most of these children were forced out of their home due to a domestic violence incident, drug-related or other criminal offense. Shelter workers contact representatives from *Spouses Behind the Badge* about a child at their location who is having a birthday. A representative from *Spouses Behind the Badge* and a Redding police officer go to the shelter with a backpack filled with a blanket, pillow, crayons, coloring book, toothbrush, toothpaste, and a toy related to the child's age. There will also be a birthday cake brought to the child.

The first birthday delivery took place in April 2009, the day after a mother and her children, including her 4-year-old daughter, fled from their home during a domestic dispute. The children had witnessed the arrest of their father who had beaten their mother during an argument. When the Operation Blue Birthday team arrived for the 4-year-old's birthday celebration, she was frightened to see the police feeling they may take her mommy away like they did with her dad. Her mother and shelter workers sat with the little girl while the police officer came up with the goodies to deliver to her, including the cake. The little girl was so excited to see the presents, the sight brought tears to everyone's eyes.

A week later, Mrs. Barner spoke with the staff at the shelter who advised the little girl had not stopped talking about the police officer and how wonderful he was. Two goals were accomplished on that day; a child's

birthday was not forgotten and her fear of law enforcement had faded.

The program is currently funded by small donations from each of the members of the group, as well as from some community members. A fund-raising raffle currently is being held from June 15 to 20, 2009, with a houseboat vacation as the grand prize (and many other items). Tickets will be available for purchase at Tri-Counties Bank, 1250 Hilltop Drive, Redding, California.

Redding Police employees traditionally have volunteered many off-duty hours contributing to worthwhile community events and social programs. It is impressive that these spouses have decided to not only give back to the community, but to do so as a positive reflection of our agency – and providing needy children with a gift of love.

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