

ADOPT-A-CARE-FAMILY

# Cabrillo program to provide gifts for children of students

By **KIMBERLY WHITE***kwhite@santacruzsentinel.com*

APTOS — Rudy Puente's two young children were a little taken aback when they saw that Santa was handing out presents to only select children. Did they somehow make it onto the "naughty" list?

"They were kind of like, 'How come we're not getting any gifts?' " Puente said with a light chuckle. "So I had to explain to them that some of us are more fortunate than others, and we're able to give a little bit extra."

Since 2009, Puente, a college counselor, has been among the faculty and staff at Cabrillo College who have participated in the "Adopt-A-CARE-Family" project, whose goal is to provide gifts to children of students who come from modest means.

The parents are enrolled in the Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education program, or CARE, which provides services to single-parent, full-time students who receive assistance through various Santa Cruz County providers.

Veronica Leon coordinates services for CARE and its umbrella program, Extended Opportunity Program and Services. CARE's budget this year is about \$70,000, and those funds are used in part to provide meal and gas cards and child care services to about 35 students.

CARE operates under the umbrella of the larger, statewide EOPS, which gives a leg up to low-income students who begin their college careers at a remedial level. Services include priority registration, academic counseling, financial assistance,



CONTRIBUTED

**David Trevino, director of the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services program at Cabrillo College, distributes gifts to Cabrillo students' children during last year's 'Adopt-A-CARE-Family' project finale celebration at the college cafeteria.**

and help paying for books and school supplies. Participants feel that they're "part of a group on campus and part of a community, which is critical for those students to stay in school," Leon said.

She launched the "Adopt-A-CARE-Family" project in 2007 so participating students' children would not have to go without gifts during the holiday season. And it didn't take much persuasion to get faculty and staff involved. The first year,

## ADOPT-A-CARE-FAMILY PROJECT

**PURPOSE:** Cabrillo faculty and staff purchase gifts for children of Cabrillo students enrolled in the Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education program, or CARE, which provides services for single-parent, full-time students of modest means.

**BUDGET:** CARE has a budget of \$70,000; the Adopt-A-CARE-Family project is funded through donations from faculty, staff, students and local businesses.

**INFORMATION:** Call Veronica Leon at 479-6531 or email [veleon@cabrillo.edu](mailto:veleon@cabrillo.edu).

all of the roughly 60 families who submitted gift wish lists were "adopted," with EOPS director David Trevino, dressed as Santa Claus, distributing the gifts during a celebration held in early December in the school cafeteria.

The costs of hosting those events are covered by donations from Cabrillo's faculty, staff and student body, as well as local businesses, which donate food, arts and crafts supplies, and raffle prizes.

On Dec. 9, dozens of children of Cabrillo students will watch in wide-eyed wonder as Trevino — decked out in a red suit and long, flowing white beard — pulls up to campus in a bright red fire truck, complements of the Aptos/La Selva Fire Protection District.

"He'll be making a big entrance," Leon said with a laugh.