

Country Santa struggling to keep stockings stuffed

By Laura Stokes

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The list grows longer with each passing day, but if Country Santa's bag isn't filled to the brim come Christmas Eve, even some tykes on the good list will find their stockings empty on Christmas morn.

Country Santa, or Buddy Cox as he is known the other 11 months of the year, is gearing up to provide gifts to hundreds of children across the Upstate who would have nothing otherwise and is keeping his fingers crossed that the donations will come in to meet the needs.

"Kids' happiness at Christmastime hangs in the balance. We're being inundated by calls," he said. "We can only help the number of kids that the public allows us to. We're going to have to level off. I just don't think we can match what we've done last year based on what's coming in."

Cox has transformed his Pumpkintown home into Santa's workshop for the past 26 years. Last year he provided \$50 worth of toys to a record 2,400 children. He said requests for help just kept coming in and he didn't have the heart to let anyone down. But he said this year things are likely to be tight because of last year's numbers.

"When the dust settled we had about half of our cash reserves left," he said. "We're in a tight situation where we're going to be in a



OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

At Pickens County's North Pole: Country Santa Buddy Cox, left, and "elves" Tim Scully, center, and Bob Spalding unpack donated toys at Country Santa headquarters in Pumpkintown. More than 2,000 children will get gifts this year.

"We're going to have to level off. I just don't think we can match what we've done last year based on what's coming in."

— Buddy Cox, Country Santa

guarded situation unless the donations start coming in. It's one of those things where we're at the crest of the cliff and we know we've got to jump off the cliff and hopefully we'll fly."

A slew of "elves," as Cox likes to call his volunteers, will be working steadily up until Christmas Eve in order to pull off their amazing feat. One of the head elves,

Bob Spalding, will be by Cox's side throughout the month of December to see that the work gets done.

Elves' work involves picking up donations from drop sites, sorting and organizing the toys, packing bags for children and finally, delivering them on Christmas Eve.

"I'm looking forward to it. I'm all geared up," Spalding said.

WANT MORE?

■ For more information on drop sites for toys or volunteering opportunities, visit the Country Santa Web site, www.countrysanta.org.

GreenvilleOnline.com

■ To learn more about the Country Santa, go to GreenvilleOnline.com.

But like Cox, he said he has some concerns about meeting the needs this year.

"We need toys, that's for sure," Spalding said. "I believe we're a weekend short this year, so everything's

See **SANTA** on page 7B

SANTA

FROM PAGE 1B

going to come to a head a lot sooner."

Cox values a good elf and this year has added an "elf house" onto his own home to accommodate the coming onslaught of volunteers. The "elf house" will provide a place for warming toes, recharging with sugar cookies, and of course the all-important restroom.

"My elves, they're showing up

and they're getting ready," Cox said. "We know it's a lot of hard work and very painful at times, but there's just something there that draws you back."

For countless elves as well as Cox, it just wouldn't be Christmas without Country Santa, despite all the work.

"Every year when I start thinking about my mom, really what I'm doing is continuing on her attitude to give back," he said. "When I see a kid on a back road with nothing, I realized, hey, that was me. I just could not walk away from that."