

Thornton Construction's Gift of Giving

Despite the ailing U.S. economy, the thirty



employees of Miami-based Thornton Construction Company decided to celebrate the holidays by sponsoring a toy drive. However, when they discovered an urgent need to "adopt" a family at the Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital (JDCH), they switched. In this program, contributions are handed directly to a needy family instead of being applied to general hospital operating funds. They contacted JDCH for details, and then they went into action.

Initially their goal was to raise enough money to adopt a single family. But when Thornton's president announced that the company would match employee contributions, every employee became their own fundraiser. The receptionist baked cookies which she displayed at the front desk, selling them to vendors, subcontractors, and any other visitors who passed through. The enthusiasm spread, and with the matching funds, the group eventually raised

enough to sponsor *three* needy families.

"Employees were thrilled to donate and got very personally involved," says Office Manager Silvia E. Garcia-Serra.

A medical social worker for JDCH's Pediatric Specialty Center, first connected the Thornton group with a family whose nine-year-old daughter suffered a stroke. Initially, the girl lost 80% of her heart function, survived renal failure, and was on a ventilator. After a few weeks of rehabilitation, she is now able to communicate with slurred speech and moves using a walker.

A second recipient is a family whose curly-haired, four-year-old daughter has end-stage renal disease and has been close to death more than once. Her severe kidney condition requires a full-time, live-in nurse. The third recipient family's income is so low, their two-year-old son has been nutritionally challenged since birth and isn't growing properly. His loving, devoted parents have traded mentoring Spanish-speaking families at JDCH in exchange for emergency assistance.

Laura De Marchena, Thornton's Business Development Coordinator, sums up the feelings of the company. "Throughout the year, Thornton sponsors events for Broward College, Miami

Dade College, and Jackson Hospital. In addition, every year they sponsor the MHS-Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital Memorial Classic. But, this effort was much more personal. Meeting these families gave us hope that anything is possible. Seeing them was really touching because it taught us that with faith, you can accomplish anything. You forget the economy and everything else in life and just focus on these families and their stories."

"The families were so grateful and thanked us for our good deed, but at the end of this gathering, it was Thornton's staff that was giving thanks," adds Garcia-Serra. "It's not every day that we come across families with such struggles. To have the perseverance and the hope that they have when their child is sick inspired us. I believe that what we got out of this visit by meeting them and hearing their stories was more than they will ever know. They showed us what the true meaning of the Holidays is, what the true value of giving is. To be inspired by their dedication, love and devotion to their child



was the gift they gave us."