

Charity helps give kids a lift

■ Now in its ninth year, Project Ho Ho Ho offered limousine rides and toys to needy children.

By Brian Williams
Dispatch Staff Reporter

A sleigh ride to the North Pole might have been their first choice, but hundreds of children were happy to settle for a limousine ride around Downtown yesterday.

"You know why it's so fun?" 7-year-old Stacy Redd asked. "Because I just love riding in a limousine."

Stacy, his two sisters and his mother looped around Downtown at noon yesterday, watching skyscrapers out the window and *Sesame Street* on the television, in a plush, 34-foot-long Lincoln Town Car provided by Ringer Limousine Service.

Ringer donated the use of two limousines, which were the highlight of the ninth Project Ho Ho Ho.

The Rev. Anthony T. Hodge, who heads Earth Temple Inc., arranged for the rides and for toys to be given to about 500 children who showed up between 10 a.m. and noon at Prince Hall Masonic Temple, 988 E. Long St.

Alicia Redd, 30, said she heard about Project Ho Ho Ho from a friend last year, then signed up her kids when she saw a television announcement about the gift giveaway and limousine rides. She drove Stacy, 6-year-old Najalia and 1-year-old T'nasia to the temple from their home in Linden.

Each kid received a small talking stuffed animal, donated by the toy company Great American Fun Corp. Children also received bookmarks and Christmas carol booklets. Many also took advantage of the 20-minute limousine rides.

Hodge estimated that Earth Temple has given toys, food, clothing and money to more than 10,000 children in need in the past nine years.

"I really like doing this," he said. "After 364 days of the year of pain, this day of being able to help others makes it worthwhile."



Tim Revell / Dispatch

From left, Stacy, 7; Najalia, 6; T'nasia, 1; and their mother, Alicia Redd, relish their first-ever limousine ride through Project Ho Ho Ho.

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REV. ANTHONY T. HODGE
on Project Ho Ho Ho

In past years, the event has been held at First AME Zion Church on Bryden Road and at the East Side YMCA. Hodge described it as a "community event with a spiritual theme."

He said that it's often a struggle to get enough gifts donated for families, but that some donors always come through.

Hodge called Earth Temple a non-profit faith-based organization that has a focus on community and envi-

ronment. Hodge, who hosts a cable-access evangelistic TV program on Sundays, said the temple also sponsors other events, such as the Mount Vernon Reunion.

Herman Ringer, owner of Ringer Limousine, said he enjoyed offering the children rides because it gives them a chance to do something they can't ordinarily do.

"This is the third year we've done it," he said. "The last two times, I was there and told them, 'This is what happens when you're good.' It gives them something to shoot for."

Redd said it was the first limousine ride for her children.

It won't be the last if Najalia has her way. The thrill of riding in a luxurious automobile complete with television, mirrored ceiling with lights and a jar of Grey Poupon mustard, just like in the TV commercial, might linger for a while.

"I liked a whole bunch of stuff," she said.