

Christmas gets good rap at Covenant House party

By MICHAEL PRITCHARD
Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Michelle and Christine have figured one thing out — you can't dance to "Jingle Bells".

Nope, you gotta have rap. And at the first ever Christmas party for city youth at the Covenant House on St. James Place, the Muniz girls made that crystal clear.

Don't get them wrong, they've got nothing against "Have a Holly Jolly Christmas." But this was a party.

And the volunteers running the party knew that. They caved in quickly and off came "Here Comes Santa Claus" and on went Tone Loc.

And Michelle and Christine got to move. And I mean move. They didn't just cut some rug, they shred it to bits.

"We learned the steps from Bobby Brown, M.C. Hammer and those guys," said Michelle. "We have a lot of fun here, we watch television, movies, get to do art. Then we watch more TV. They've got cable you know."

The Covenant House opened up less than a year ago to provide outreach services to homeless and city youth. But almost since they opened their doors, they've wanted to expand, said Rosalyn Snyder, site administrator for the house.

"Right now our goal is to get an overnight shelter built," she said. "That's what we really need. We offer some programs in the daytime and they can come in. But we've found the biggest need they have, is for overnight facilities."

Covenant House was founded in New York City to offer services to youth on city streets, whether they are homeless or their home life forces them to stay on the street, Snyder said.

The house offers everything from clothing and shoes to AIDS

and drug education classes.

"We've found that we really can't handle the needs of these kids," said Bob Geiger, Chairman of the Board of directors of Covenant House. "The need is so overwhelming that it is more than we are able to do."

The New York operation has now expanded into three New Jersey Cities — Atlantic City, Trenton and Newark, Geiger said.

The houses offer a variety of services, including providing shower facilities.

"I had never really thought of that as something they might need," Geiger said. "But we found that sometimes they can't get a shower, so we've made sure all our houses have them."

But Friday, the only need being filled was for kids to have fun.

Children of all ages came to the party, which included kids from the Atlantic City Rescue Mission, the Salvation Army shelter and other city youth programs.

What they got was a turkey dinner with all the fixings, donated by Caesars Casino Hotel and the Trump Organization, and presents and decorations donated by a number of organizations and stores.

Perhaps the most noteworthy donations were a batch of presents donated by cocktail waitresses at Merv Griffin's Resorts.

"They just called and said they saw an add we ran for donations," Snyder said. "So instead of having a pollyanna among themselves, they figured they'd just give some gifts to the kids. They took it totally on themselves."

So the kids danced, ate, and got a present under the tree. Not a bad way to spend a holiday.

"I'm having a lot of fun," said Miriam, 18. "Usually I'd just be sitting home bored. I come down here a lot."



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