

Local hopes to involve children to give

by Julie Sharp

A local waiter from Fonz's restaurant in Manhattan Beach plans to spend his upcoming vacation as Santa Claus to orphaned children in Kenya.

Sean Johnston does not intend to don the white beard or wear a red suit but he will be taking two large duffel bags of donated clothing and games to a severely impoverished area of Kenya within the city of Nairobi. Johnston hopes that his monkey-lined box sitting among the cupcakes and cookies in Becker's Bakery in downtown Manhattan Beach for the next couple of weeks will catch the attention of neighborhood children who want to send some of their goods to the other side of the hemisphere.

"I really want this to be about children helping children," said Johnston. He would like the giving to be as personal as possible with the donor sharing their name and school attended, along with a picture of a pet or something they enjoy attached to the donated item.

"I have been wanting to do this for a couple of years," said Johnston. "Instead of just a regular vacation, I wanted to experience something different."

Johnston did his homework, searched the Internet and found the Global Volunteer Network, which matched him to an established group in Africa that works with orphanages there. Plans for the trip

were delayed by two months due to recent strife in Kenya, but the month-long adventure for Johnston begins in April.

"I do have some concerns. There are normally about 30 volunteers within this organization each month. This month there were only three," said Johnston.

He will be placed with a host family and intends to spend his time with the children at the orphanage and serving in whatever capacity is needed, whether it is teaching English or plastering walls.

In an attempt to enhance the donors' act of giving, Johnston plans to capture it all on videotape and photos, and this way he hopes to be able to share the experience with the schools identified on the items donated.

For more information about how to give, call Johnston at (310) 433-4106.



Sean Johnston with his donation box at Becker's Bakery. He is seeking gently used clothing and simple board games for children in Kenya ages 3 to 16.

(photo by Chris Miller)