



SCOTT TAKUSHI/PIONEER PRESS

Thousands of people showed up and waited for hours in the cold to collect a bag of free Christmas groceries from the Disciples Ministry Church Mission in North Minneapolis on Wednesday.

FOOD

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placed nearby for those in need of more protection from the cold.

It was one of many lines of people that could be found in the Twin Cities on Wednesday, most of them indoors and most of them formed to purchase Christmas gifts. Most of the people standing in line outside the mission did so out of need.

In a swirl of English and Spanish, Hmong and Ukrainian, they cursed the weather, shouted down people who tried to sneak into the line and traded stories and jokes.

The crowd, ranging from elderly women pulling shopping carts to preschoolers hanging on their parents' necks, had gathered to collect about 40 pounds of free groceries each, handed out for Christmas in bags that covered the church's basement.

They moved through in groups of 20, past Santa and Mrs. Claus, past folding tables piled with grocery bags, and out to the parking lot, where they picked up bags of bread and fruit.

There were some people who clearly took advantage of the Christmas spirit and filled the trunks of their cars with bags of free food.

One woman had to cram four grocery bags into the back of her Ford Bronco because an expensive loudspeaker system had taken up much of the storage room.

It took about 3½ hours for 40 volunteers to hand out some 100 tons of chicken and butter, soap, beans, cereal and ice cream.

"It started out with one bag, and I

don't know how it got to this," said Paul Arnpolous, pastor at the mission, which houses a hot meal program, a food shelf, a jobs program and a small packaging company, among other things.

He expects the mission to give away more than 10 million pounds of food this year — almost a million more than last year.

Arnpolous said about 40,000 people a month pass through the mission's doors, coming in from suburbs and outlying towns, as well as Minneapolis and St. Paul.

"There are a lot more people coming, more families, and lots of people getting laid off," he said. "And there's a lot of people, too, who are working, but just can't make it."

Standing outside, sharing a pair of tan gloves with her next-door neighbor, Christine James was counting herself among those. She was trained as a nursing assistant, but she said she'd been out of work for about three years.

"A lot of people feel ashamed because they're not in the kind of position that they used to be in," she said. "And it hurts, it really hurts..."

Now living with her 15-year-old daughter in North Minneapolis, James said she had come to the mission to get a Christmas present.

"I've never been as poor as I am now," she said. "Normally, I'd get a lot of little odds-and-ends jobs, and I'd buy lots of presents. I thank God for living, but that's about it this year."

There were Christmas trees piled up in the parking lot behind the mission, but she didn't think she'd get one to take home.

"It isn't much use if you can't afford the lights," she said.

MALL

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Bloomington colossus, with sizable but hardly overwhelming crowds. Most shoppers came dressed casually in sweaters and blue jeans and appeared to be searching strenuously for a few good gifts.

Melba Mackins of Burnsville was among the more active members of the mall's shopping corps. She arrived around 11 a.m. and by 3 p.m. or so had managed to find about \$400 worth of merchandise, stuffed into enough shopping bags to fill the back of a station wagon.

Mackins said the need to keep a lot of youngsters happy prompted her expedition. She has four children, six grandchildren, a niece and a nephew, and she was shopping for them all Wednesday.

"I found some good bargains," she said, resting on a bench in the middle of one of the mall's busy corridors. "I bought some sweatshirts for a dollar."

Mackins said she wasn't sure when her day at the mall would finally end, but she noted that she definitely would not be doing any more shopping before Christ-

mas.

"I'm going to cook all day tomorrow," she said. "I've got 12 pies to make."

Among the mall's emporiums is FAO Schwarz, which is noted for its unique — and in some cases — extremely expensive toys.

But while the store was filled with customers Wednesday afternoon, there did not appear to be any rush to buy goodies like a \$7,500 Mercedes child's car that comes complete with its own tiny gasoline engine.

Instead, most customers seemed more interested in things like video games, stuffed animals and other less spectacularly priced items popular with the younger set.

Fran Feldman, the store's assistant manager, confirmed that while some big ticket items (such as battery-operated cars that can cost up to \$500) sell briskly at this time of year, the old standbys never seem to lose their appeal. Stuffed animals, known in the toy trade as plush, "are always big sellers," she said.

As for the \$7,500 Mercedes, Feldman said, "We sell more of those in California than we do here."

Somehow, that is not surprising, if for no other reason than the Mercedes is a convertible.