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## **BMAR's annual toy drive benefits "Operation Kathy's Kids"**

January 14, 2013 - Front Section

The Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors (BMAR), the Bronx YMCA and the three YMCAs in Staten Island came together to spread the joy of the Holiday Season. For many years David Miller, board of governor member, Webster Lock & Hardware, and Perry Gault, past-president, Perry Gault Management Co., Inc., have been sponsoring the toy drive during BMAR's annual Holiday Party. The toys are then gifted to families in need of a helping hand

This year, however, the toy drive underwent an appropriate change to address the damage caused by Super Storm Sandy. At a board of governors meeting a few weeks before the Holiday Party, Kathy Zamechansky, 2013 BMAR president-elect, KZA Realty Group, Inc., suggested that the families living in Staten Island and the Bronx that were affected by Super Storm Sandy ought to be the recipients of this year's toy drive. She also suggested that BMAR work with Bronx and Staten Island YMCAs to identify affected families. Mark Engel, past-president of BMAR and the president of Langsam Property Service, Inc., then came up with the named "Operation Kathy's Kids" (OKK) for this year's toy drive.

The incoming association executive officer for BMAR, Eliezer Rodriguez, Esq., who was hired to replace Nunzio Del Greco after his retirement in September, was asked to coordinate the toy distribution. Rodriguez, as his friends call him, is a resident of the Bronx and lives two blocks away from BMAR's office. Although he was not officially scheduled to start his new role until January 1, said "yes" to Zamechansky.

Eli and Janine Schall, BMAR's office manager, then picked up the pieces and brought "Operation Kathy's Kids" to life. The Bronx Y immediately said yes and its executive director, Sharlene Brown, reached out to the Staten Island Ys and they were delighted by BMAR's community initiative to bring joy to their Island during the Holiday Season. On December 5, 2012, many turned out for the largest holiday party in the Bronx with unwrapped toys. Eli now refers to "Operation Kathy's Kids" as "The Miracle on Williamsbridge Road."

On December 22, 2012, Eli and Sharlene took off in his Burgundy Honda Pilot sleigh headed for Staten Island. Twelve affected families each received a \$100 gift card and bags of toys. Tears of joy flowed from the eyes of one mother for the helping hands she received in her time of need. A home visit to one father who was still in the midst of repairing his destroyed basement, got choked up by the generosity of BMAR as he accepted a gift card and a bag full of gifts for his family. Before getting on their sleigh ride back across the Verrazano Bridge, each family received a Christmas card that was created by elves attending the YMCA's after school program at P.S. 108. Each of the twelve families received a card representing one of the twelve days of Christmas.

One leg of Operation Kathy's Kids was then completed and Eli turned his attention on the twelve Bronx families who were selected to receive gifts on Christmas Day. On Christmas day Eli and his wife, Fiordaliza, his two elves, Miguel, age 10, and Cristian, age 8, and Sharlene loaded the toys on

the sleigh. They checked their list not once, but twice before taking off. The distribution went as planned and the Bronx families were filled with joy and one father was extremely touched that BMAR and the Bronx Y took the additional step of bringing gifts to their home instead of celebrating Christmas elsewhere. Sharlene told the families that she was thankful for being able to spread the spirit of the Holiday Season and for standing behind the Y's motto - "The Y is here for good." Eli and his family considered themselves blessed for being able to share the true meaning of Christmas by bringing joy and helping their neighbors. Bronx News 12 did a wonderful job covering the story and shared these magical moments with their viewers.

"Operation Kathy's Kids" shut down their operation for the year on Three Kings Day, January 6th, by visiting two families that were not available on Christmas day. As they were headed home, Eli exclaimed, "What a wonderful way to begin a new career," and his two boys said "God bless us all, everyone."

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