

So-Cal Boaters help make it a Merry Christmas for the poor children of La Paz



X-mas present coupons are handed out in the barrio

Last October we put out a call for presents for Club Cruceros' annual Christmas party for the poorest children in La Paz. We ended up shipping about 15 huge trash bags full of soft toys and clothing plus two cartons of more fragile or hard-edged items to La Paz. Club Cruceros (mostly American boaters in La Paz) works with Camara Junior and local merchants to produce a Feliz Navidad. Mort and Jane Firstenfeld chaired the Christmas drive and Jane sent us the following report of this year's events.

The elements, the border and internal squabbling made it

something of a cliffhanger, but the poor children of La Paz had a very special Christmas, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of contributors in the States and scores of local volunteers.

The annual joint Christmas Drive of La Paz' Club Cruceros and Camara Junior (JCs International) provided some 6,000 toys and 2,000 packages of clothing to the neediest families in the city and surrounding areas. Additionally, more than 200 new blankets have been purchased, most of which have yet to be distributed.

Subasta 91, a two day Christ-

mas fair and charity auction held December 7 and 8 at Marina de La Paz, was virtually rained out the first day, dampening spirits and revenues. Fortunately, the sun came out on Sunday, and an enthusiastic crowd enjoyed gourmet refreshments, artists' displays, a lottery, games of chance, a flea market, and the bi-lingual auction in which more than 200 lots of donated goods and services were sold to the highest bidder. Mac and Mary Shroyer cleared out their parking lot, which was transformed into a festival setting, on-stage entertainment kept sales going until long after dark. The net after all fund-raising and staging expenses was more than \$10,000 U.S.

Donations of used clothing and other goods, collected at eight U.S. pick-up points publicized in the yachting press, were generous, but their arrival here in La Paz was problematic. Mac Shroyer had arranged for free delivery of the truckload via Southport Marine, but a last-minute change in customs personnel and procedure in Tijuana made for anxious moments, and some Cruceros members lost hope. Cruceros' event chairman Mort Firstenfeld and his JC counterpart Dr. Jose Acosta persisted, however, and through the cooperation of DIF, the Mexican family aid department, the shipment arrived as workers assembled to pack presents at the downtown Christmas tree. The quantity and quality of gently used clothing (some 30 large cartons and bags) was truly impressive, and much appreciated.

On Christmas Eve Day, teams of JCs and Cruceros visited the

poorest neighborhoods in and around the city, delivering tickets to as many children as we had presents for. The scene at Cuahutemoc Park on Christmas Day was wild - whole families dressed in Sunday best turned out for games, pinatas, Santa Claus, and of course the great give-away of toys and clothing. Most volunteers agreed that it was the finest possible way to spend the holiday.

The following Saturday, volunteers caravanned some 50 miles to Todos Santos on Baja's Pacific coast, the farthest extension of the municipality of La Paz. Again, games and refreshments preceded the give-away to some 300 children, in which effort La Paz mayor Antonio Wilson Gonzalez and his wife Norma assisted. A local business owner later commented, "this is wonderful. Todos Santos has never seen so many presents." Similar smaller "fiestas" continue in nearby farming and fishing communities.

This is the third year that the cruising community has joined with the JCs for this important and heartwarming event, and plans are already being formed for the 1992 campaign. The California boating community and press have become major contributors to the "Arbol de la Navidad de los Niños Pobres" (Christmas Tree of the Poor Children), and their participation has been duly noted and appreciated locally.

Your counterparts here in La Paz thank you whole-heartedly for your generous help, and hope to welcome more of you here to our warm shores in the coming year. - Jane Firstenfeld