



Graeme Morton, Calgary Herald  
 Charleen Spoletini, left, and James Sylvester were among students from Bears paw Christian School working Tuesday on Operation Christmas Child.

## Image of kids' smiles stokes volunteers

### Operation Christmas Child kicks into gear

**GRAEME MORTON**  
 CALGARY HERALD

**T**hey operate with the precision of a small army — seniors, teens and everyone in between — packing hope for thousands of children they will likely never meet.

The Samaritan's Purse warehouse in northeast Calgary pulses with activity these days as hundreds of volunteers working three-hour shifts inspect, sort and pack shoeboxes filled with gifts for youngsters in 90 Third World countries.

Samaritan's Purse spokeswoman Amie Gosselin said more than 100,000 shoeboxes have been processed in the first 10 days of the campaign. That number will easily top 300,000 before the campaign winds up next month, with Calgary serving as the clearing house for all of Western Canada.

Dozens of red-vested White Hatters, usually seen helping puzzled visitors at the Calgary International Airport, were on the Samaritan's Purse sorting

lines Tuesday as crates of shoeboxes began their long journey to Vietnam.

"As well as the spiritual side, Christmas is really all about the kids," said Elizabeth Wesley, who started the White Hatters group 16 years ago.

"You can visualize the sparkle in the kids' eyes when they open one of these boxes," she said.

James Sylvester and Charleen Spoletini, both 15, were part of the Grade 10 class from Bears paw Christian School donating their time Tuesday morning.

"When you see the photos of the smiling kids who receive these shoeboxes, you feel like you're doing something worthwhile here," said Sylvester.

"I get a spiritual feeling about it," said Spoletini. "When the children receive these packages, they will know that someone far away loves them."

The shoeboxes are filled with toys, toiletries and school supplies and are sorted appropriately for gender and age. Gosselin said items such as shampoo and toothpaste, which could leak or spill in transit, are removed and donated to local social service agencies.

Shoeboxes will be accepted until Nov. 30 at the Samaritan's Purse office, 20 Hopewell Way N.E. For more information, see [www.samaritanspurse.ca](http://www.samaritanspurse.ca).