

# For five decades, Houston couple has brightened children's Christmas

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HOUSTON—George and Novice Bruner's Christmas list includes the names of more than 200 needy Houston children.

Even more impressive, the Bruners' ministry to children began more than 50 years ago.

In 1956, the principal of Burnet Elementary School in Houston called Bruner. The principal, who had been a mentor to Bruner through the [Big Brother program](#), said he needed help supplying gifts for more than 25 children. That first year, the Bruners delivered more than 200 gifts.

George and Novice Bruner of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston have given more than 40,000 gifts to about 4,000 children over the last 54 years.

Over the years, about 4,000 children have received more than 40,000 gifts from the Bruners.

For about the first 15 years, the Bruners didn't tell many people about their ministry. But when wrapping presents grew to be such a gargantuan task, they enlisted the help of family, friends and their church, [Tallowood Baptist in Houston](#). The church's Acteens, in particular, have provided great help in wrapping gifts.

In addition to wrappers, the number of Santa Clauses making deliveries

also has increased. Each gift is delivered to the child's home by Santa on Christmas Eve.

"When you pull that gift out of the bag and call out that first name, you should see their eyes," said Bruner, who is nearing his 82nd birthday. "They can't figure out how you knew their name. After we have that moment when their eyes light up, I leave the rest of them for Mom to pass out, because I have a lot of other stops to make."

Those Christmas Eve deliveries make the year-round shopping worth it, Bruner said.

"They'll see me coming in with my bag, and say: 'Mama, I told you he was coming! I told you he was coming.' Every time, something happens to make it a special blessing," he said.

Each child receives six to 10 gifts, the Bruners said, so that they will feel special. Every gift is wrapped and has the child's name on it. Each child also receives a stocking stuffed with treats.

The Bruners try to tailor the gifts to each family. If there are multiple children in a family, each child receives a ball for a different sport rather than duplicates. The Bruners also try to give each family a game the parents and children can play together to create bonding times. Each child old enough to read also receives a Bible.

The number of clothing items is minimal, Bruner said.

"This is Christmas, and they don't get too excited about clothes. Even the people who help me with the wrapping don't want to wrap the clothes. They move them out of the way so that they can wrap more toys," he explained.

The number of gifts has necessitated the erection of a storage building

behind the Bruners' home.

"After I fell out of the attic one day crawling around up there, I thought it was time," Bruner quipped.

"Especially since he fell on me," his wife added with a laugh.

This year, the Bruners received the Jefferson Award from a local television station that described the award as "the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for public and community service." The couple finally made someone else's list.