

49ers bring program's bounty to Tenderloin school



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SAN FRANCISCO -

Christmas came early for a group of elementary school students at the Tenderloin Community School.

(Cindy Chew/The Examiner)
Niners offensive lineman Eric Heitmann gets help delivering a new rug from first-graders at Tenderloin Community School.

Five-year-olds screamed and danced around players from the 49ers' offensive line, as the gigantic men, who barely fit through the front door, walked into their school on Tuesday. Each man was carrying an armful of art supplies, sports equipment and globes. The players brought the school supplies that teachers had requested through the Donors Choose SF Connect Challenge for Our Schools program.

"It's a rare day when you get new P.E. equipment and its even more rare when you get 25 globes," school Principal Herb Packer said. "[The teachers] love it and they just feel like somebody cares about them."

Donors Choose connects the teachers directly with people who want to help San Francisco schools. Teachers go online and fill out specific requests for their classrooms and donors can then choose what they would like to fund. The San Francisco 49ers Foundation donated \$10,000 to buy the equipment requested at seven schools in The City, including the Tenderloin Community School.

"What we are trying to do is to encourage teachers to be creative in the classroom," said Becky Johnson of Donors Choose. "It's really teachers saying, 'My kids really deserve better than this and I'm going out and getting it.'"

The 300 students at the school come mostly from families with moderate incomes in the Tenderloin area, according to Packer. He said whatever help the children can get is very important. But on Tuesday most of the students were too enamored with the players to pay attention to their new toys.

"It's so cool to see the Niners because I always wanted to meet them," 8-year-old Jon Tue said as he watched the players serve kindergartners food. "And I told them they better hit the Chiefs hard [on Sunday]."

For the players, who came to the school on their only off day of the week, the opportunity to play with the children was special.

"It's electric, it's like coming out on Sunday almost," said 49ers right tackle Kwame Harris, who constantly had children up to his waste following his every move.

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