For Tampa Bay seniors with nothing under the Christmas tree, a wish granted

Some nursing home residents have little spare cash and no one to share the season with — until Resident's Hope gift giving program steps in.

Barbara Rotunda, second from left, and Joan Torell-McDonald, to her right, shopped Nov. 15 at the Bay Pines Walmart for the Resident's Hope gift giving program. Torell-McDonald, left, and Rotunda shop for gifts on Nov. 9 at the Bay Pines Walmart for the Resident's Hope gift giving program.

BY LAKE DUGGER

On a dizzying winter afternoon, two women leaned over an empty cart outside the Bay Pines Walmart, consulting a handwritten spreadsheet.

They had made a list. Checked it twice.

And organized, by category and size, the wishes of more than 65 aging strangers.

A doll, a Bible, a book of word searches — large print, please.

A radio, a razor, chocolate pudding cups and a phone.

At seven nursing homes across Pinellas County, the women asked workers which residents had the greatest needs and who would be alone for the holidays.

“Ask them what they want most,” Barbara Rotunda had said. “It can be anything.”

A stuffed cat, socks, sheets and shampoo.

A Marine Corps T-shirt, medium; a Radio Shack radio, a razor, chocolate pudding cups and a phone.

A teddy bear to hug. A baby doll to hold.

“You,” Rotunda, 63, said to her friend Jean Torell-McDonald, 79, “where should we begin?”

BY LANE DEGREGORY

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Inflation has cooled, so why does everything still feel so expensive? Four charts clear it up.

Tampa Bay Times said the inflation rate has improved but remains abnormally high. Meanwhile, wages haven’t kept up, so every dollar earned is worth less.

With less purchasing power, residents have cut back on luxury spending and some essentials. Rent and energy costs have skyrocketed, and more families are living paycheck to paycheck.

“We just feel things are more expensive, given a few things about our economy,” said Holly Bullard, chief strategy and development officer at the Florida Policy Institute. She pointed to the state’s housing boom as one example. “We See EXPENSES, 4A”

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