



# Elf Storage, Community Parades and Other Happy Holiday Ideas

By Gary Camp

It's the time of year when wallets start to creak, and it becomes a bit more painful for everyone to spend their hard-earned money. Purses don't open as easily as they usually do, and bank account balances are generally under more scrutiny.

That's right, the holidays are upon us!

This highly anticipated time of cheer, complete with lights, Santa and merriment, is here. But when your business is considered a line item expense to many, you have to get creative. You have to think outside of the box, and use this time of year to capitalize on your community's desire to give back. It's a chance to build awareness, to create atypical reasons for people to come visit your facility, and most importantly... it's your chance to do some good.

We called self storage facilities all over the country looking for some

ideas to share, and were surprised to learn that many facilities aren't using the holiday season to their advantage. But those facilities and management companies that do create innovative programs for the holidays, do so with enthusiasm and fervor, and were glad to share some ideas with us.

Here is a brief sampling of some creative ideas worth consideration this holiday season.

## Elf Storage

Simply drop the "s" in self storage, and you have a fun, easy concept



for getting people in your front door around the holidays.

At each of the 11 Guardian Storage Solutions locations, primarily based in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area, they are busy actively promoting an "Elf Storage" program to the local community and existing customers.

"The program begins after Thanksgiving, on Black Friday, when the "S" is covered on our monument signs and wall signs throughout our properties," said Frank DeFazio, Jr., Guardian's director of marketing. "We provide marketing support for the program with collateral handouts at major malls and retail centers near our facilities, generate interest via targeted email campaigns, in-store signage promotions and colorful print ads in the holiday issues of our local print media. The program

*See Holiday Ideas, p. 10*

## Holiday Ideas, from page 9

provides discounted storage rates on smaller sized units that can be used by parents to hide their gifts from their children, and we make it convenient for them," he said.

They also offer free gift wrapping stations, holiday music, cookies and coffee, to create an enjoyable atmosphere. And they even accept shipments of customers' gifts from online retailers, and place the boxes in their units for them. It couldn't be easier for the customer.

**Elmwood Self Storage**

*Santa Stores  
with Us  
So Should You*

**504-737-7676**

Elmwood Self Storage and Wine Cellar in Harahan, Louisiana, offers a similar opportunity for customers. Everyone is invited to come in and wrap their gifts for free, and all the necessities—paper, scissors, tape, cookies and cider—are provided. It's all contained within a model unit on-site, where it is easy to find (and easy to introduce potential customers to the benefits of storing).

Anne Ballard, president of Universal Management Company, which oversees 40 locations throughout the Southeast, said the promotion creates goodwill in the community, and offers up small units at a slow time of year.

"It is designed to generate more door turns into the facility, while helping the local community they serve," said Ballard. "The investment in setup is less than \$200, and the goodwill that is generated is immense. Even if you don't happen to cover the minimal costs, we have gotten more people in the door and introduced them to the facility. When the need for self storage hits them, they will think of us."

## Become a Destination

People like to help others in need around the holiday season. By using your location as a drop-off site, you are providing a valuable service—while building awareness of your facility and location.

"An important part of my strategy is developing exciting events throughout the year that allow us to demonstrate our commitment to the neighborhoods we serve," said DeFazio. "We want to be viewed in a positive light, as a caring and active member of the communities in which we operate. So, we offer our facilities to nonprofit organization and groups as meeting places, event locations, and drop off sites."

An example is Guardian's donation of 4,000 sq. ft. of "flex space" to the United States Marine Corps for the Toys for Tots program. The space is used as the main distribution and processing warehouse space where all of the toys that are collected throughout Allegheny County will be delivered and processed.

"It will create a tremendous amount of awareness for our brand, as over 450 nonprofit organizations will visit the site during the holidays to pick up the toys that will be distributed to the families and children they serve, and over 1,000 volunteers will work at our storage facility," said DeFazio. "In addition, we'll host an open house for underprivileged families where they will visit the facility to select toys for their families. It's a powerful human interest story that will generate a great deal of local media attention and awareness for our brand; but, most importantly, will demonstrate our commitment to helping those less fortunate in our communities in any way we can."



Guardian's Toys for Tots initiative is impressive, but smaller facilities can certainly play an important role in their local communities too. Why not host a mitten/hat/scarf drive, like Self Storage Plus facilities do at their locations in Maryland and Virginia? Or a canned food or winter coat drive?

## Decorate, Decorate, Decorate

Self Storage Plus locations urge their property managers to make sure their sites are festive, which includes anything from large inflatable Santas to white lights and poinsettias in the office. The goal is to add flair to your property to grab someone's attention. People may drive by your facility every day, but when the oversized Santa, reindeer and lights go up, they take notice.

Or imagine enough lights and added attractions on your self storage property that it becomes a "go to" destination when area families take their annual drive to see the best light displays?

## Parades

Most mid- to large-sized communities have an organized, well-attended holiday parade. Why not utilize this community gathering to promote your facility?

Guardian takes advantage of their supply of large, mobile billboards in community holiday parades—their mobile storage unit delivery trucks and colorful, branded moving trucks. "Christmas lights are added, Santa Claus rides on the back, and our property managers throw candy out to the children," said DeFazio.

And of course the candy thrown out to those in attendance includes a Guardian Storage Solutions marketing message on it!

There are opportunities aplenty during this time of year, and only a little creative thinking is needed to help make your self storage facility a destination for his holiday season. ❖