

CPA MEMBER  
**profile**

By Fred Dieno



## Toys for Tickets

### ARE THE DRIVERS IN YOUR CITY SMILING WHILE PAYING A PARKING TICKET?

The City of Red Deer has adopted a very popular ticketing program. The program takes place during the month of November where drivers can pay for their tickets with toys. The toys are then donated to the Red Deer Christmas Bureau for those in need. The program is one of many in Red Deer that supports the Christmas Bureau which is now in its 48th year, so that no child wakes up on Christmas morning without a toy. I would like to encourage your municipality or Parking operation to adopt a similar program.

**1384 TICKETS HAVE BEEN  
PAID THROUGH THE TOY  
DONATIONS**

**A VALUE OF \$21,200**

**OVER 1,600 TOYS DONATED**

the toy donations, at a value of \$21,200 and over 1600 toys being donated to the Christmas bureau.

In 2005, online media demonstrated successful, similar programs at the City of Kingston and Impark's Vancouver locations. The cities of Boston and Fort St. John, to name a few, also run such a program. An email to Kingston was quickly answered with information on their program and after convincing a department manager and the Senior

Management Team that this is a good way to support the City and a great public relations move, City Council gave their approval and the planning was on.

To meet the program's goal, the City tried to make this program as simple and painless as possible for the staff and more importantly, for the ticket donors. The eligible tickets are issued for parking infractions only and include everything from a meter violation (\$30), up to and including parking in a handicapped stall, (\$150). To encourage maximum participation, the early payment rate is in effect for the whole program period if paid with a toy (a \$20 reduction).

When a vehicle is ticketed, a leaflet is placed with the ticket informing them of the program and how to participate. Here is some of the information provided:

- Parking tickets issued from November 1 to December 4th are eligible to be paid through the donation of a toy.
- Location and dates that toy donations would be accepted.
- Recommended toys that included fishing rods, cars and trucks, sleeping bags, mp3 players, DVD players, games, puzzles and books, hockey sticks (items like glue and war toys were not acceptable).

Press releases are distributed at the start, middle of the month and the day before the start of the collection period. Newspaper ads were taken out on Friday before the collection period, and a media advisory was also issued inviting the media to the afternoon of first day of the collection to see the toys. In addition, I would talk to reporters at any time to get the word out. The radio, TV and newspapers quickly jumped onto this program and helped get the word out to the citizens.

While the city doesn't advertise this, we will accept toy payments starting the first day of the campaign. This enables drivers from out of town or those who aren't available on the collection date to participate in the program. This year, 132 tickets were paid with toys before the collection date.

We keep in close contact with the Christmas Bureau to try to anticipate which age groups they will be short toys for, and recommend these toys to inquiring drivers. In 2009 the Bureau anticipated they would be short of toys for the older children (from 12 to 16 years old) and so that was the focus of our collections.

When a toy was brought in for payment the staff would check the following:

- that the ticket was eligible to be paid with a toy, (a parking ticket issued between November 1st and December 4th),
- the toy was new and in the original wrapping,
- and, was of equal or greater value to the amount owed on the parking ticket (we allow up to 10% less.) If the value of the toy was less than the ticket the driver paid the difference.

It is our experience that speed and convenience is what most payees appreciate. During the two day collection period an area is setup on the main floor of city hall and a stamp is used as a proof of payment on the driver's portion of the ticket and on the office portion. A driver can be in and out in seconds if desired, although most stop to gawk at the pile of toys or to thank the staff for the opportunity to pay a parking ticket with a toy. This is a great morale booster.

As the City of Red Deer uses an in-house database to record all tickets, a separate disposition code is used to keep track of all tickets. At the end of the program, a journal entry shows the amount collected and then paid out to keep the auditors happy.

Red Deer Transit graciously provides a bus and driver to transport these toys to the distribution site and all available enforcement and office staff help to load the toys on to bus and into the Christmas Bureau.

In all, this has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. The staff enjoys every minute of the collection period and the biggest challenges I have are trying to schedule everyone onto the collection desk and keeping my hands off some of the cool toys that are donated! This year we collected 22 MP3 players, 5 DVD players, more than 35 Hockey sticks; many remote control cars, trucks and helicopters; CD players, many family games. ■