

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



## Ducks Play Santa Claus, and Kids are Winners

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By Kelly Zhou/Orange County Register

TUSTIN – Two members of the Anaheim Ducks showered children with a Toys R Us shopping spree Thursday, a welcome event for low-income families during the holiday season.

Left wing Dustin Penner and center Andrew Cogliano loaded up on Nerf guns, Superman dolls and rainbow loom bracelet makers, satisfying 10 students from The Wooden Floor, a nonprofit organization that focuses on eliminating poverty through dance education.

Luis Rodriguez, 10, loads a Despicable Me doll into the shopping cart while Anaheim Ducks player Dustin Penner and Xitalli Salgado look on at the Toys R Us store in Tustin on Thursday.

Penner, decked out in a feather-lined red sweater complete with plastic icicles, roamed the aisles of Tustin's Toys R Us with Cogliano. The athletes gave \$150 of their own money to each child. Last year, Penner hosted a similar shopping spree for the Los Angeles Kings.

"When you're a kid, that's the most important thing," Cogliano said, referring to Christmas presents and spending time with family. "I'm sure they really appreciate this."

The Wooden Floor serves 375 students from Santa Ana and other cities, with year-round dance classes, performances and academic tutoring. Ten students in particular need were chosen for the shopping day.

"We feel so blessed that the Ducks think of us and our kids," said Payal Avellan, director of communications and marketing for The Wooden Floor. "Especially at this time of year, it just means so much."

Garden Grove resident Valeria Marquez, 10, checked off multiple items from her list, including a Monsters High Fangtastic Locker and the last novel from the "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" series.

Despite cheers for tablets and Apple iPads, the 8- to 11-year-olds mostly stuck with traditional Legos, Hello Kitty gear and board games.

Santa Ana resident Jose Rea, 10, considered an Xbox 360 video game before instead picking up a chess set – a game he said he has liked since the age of 1.

Rea's mother, Angeles Castro, 33, called the event a surprise and said she "fell in love" with Penner.

"To be honest, I didn't have anything to give for the kids," said Castro, who was planning to forgo presents for her three children. "This year, it's a blessing."

The Anaheim Ducks' management has sponsored an annual holiday shopping spree with The Wooden Floor since 2008. This year, the wives and significant others of Ducks players and staff will host 10 girls for a Walmart trip on Tuesday.

Avellan said the majority of its students are considered "extremely low income," which is classified by the state as a family of five living on \$31,250 a year, for example.

According to Wooden Floor, 100 percent of kids who finish the program graduate from high school on time and enroll in college – compared to 30 percent for this socioeconomic level. More than 80 percent of them stay with the program each year, Avellan said.

"The fact that these very accomplished hockey players are taking the time to spend with our kids is something that actually goes a long way to breaking the apathy that poverty can instill," Avellan said.

