

## Thousands turn up for Jesus' birthday party- (2012 Post And Courier Article)



photographs by Natalie Caula

Children enjoyed a blow-up slide and jump castle at the "Birthday Party for Jesus" on Christmas Day at the Johnson Hagood Stadium.

A line of people hugged the walls of the concrete around one side of Johnson Hagood Stadium waiting for its gates to open on Christmas Day.

Children played in grassy patches in front of the stadium as many of their parents looked at their watches. They would be allowed in at noon. The crowd remained under control as Charleston police officers stood watch.



- Thousands lined up outside the Johnson Hagood Stadium.



- S.C. Representative Wendell Gilliard, pictured left, and the event organizer Gordon Cashwell chat at the start of the "Birthday Party for Jesus" on Christmas Day.
- PLEASE SEE OTHER SIDE FOR CONTINUED ARTICLE



- Volunteers served meals to give out for the thousands who attended the event Tuesday.

Behind the gates, nearly 1,000 volunteers prepped for the large crowd that would soon be upon them. Sections of the grassy field had already been marked off with yellow tape, enclosing treats and treasures for the children, who would light up at the sight of bicycles, doughnuts, full Christmas meals, and toys.

For Gordon Cashwell, it's all in the name of Jesus and the celebration of his birth. Cashwell is the director of Without Walls Ministry, a local union of churches that reaches out to economically challenged neighborhoods in Charleston.

It's the second year the group has held the "Birthday Party for Jesus" on Christmas Day at the stadium in Charleston. Last year nearly 2,000 people attended, a number Cashwell expected to surpass this year, with what he calls the increasing need in the community. "It made me sad to see them waiting in line," Cashwell said.

There was no registration required to enter the event and everything was free. "This is about Jesus Christ. He doesn't turn anyone away, so we shant," said Tony Lewis, a board of trustees member for the school district constituent board representing the peninsula.

A choir performed, children climbed aboard an inflatable jump castle and slide, and the lucky ones who arrived first waited in a line to pick out a new bicycle.

"This should be happening in every street corner," Cashwell said.

He's grateful for all the help he got in putting the event together and was overwhelmed by the number of volunteers who spent their Christmas handing out gifts, singing carols and serving special treats.

Cashwell said it was worth every minute of work and hopes the men, women and children who spent Christmas with him this year feel as fulfilled as he does. "I hope they take away joy," he said.

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