



## Gowanda Correction Officers Spread Christmas Cheer to Ailing Children December 21, 2014

On December 11<sup>th</sup>, a few of “Santa’s elves” paid an early visit to patients at Women & Children’s Hospital in Buffalo. Only they were dressed in blue, and not the traditional red and green of the yuletide season. Accompanied by hospital staff with wish lists for children of all ages on each floor, three Correction Officers (CO’s) from Gowanda Correctional Facility (Erie County) distributed two gurney loads of toys and gifts to kids whose illnesses have caused them to become hospitalized during the holidays.



From l. to r.: Correction Officers Malek, Happel and Kelly unloading donations of toys and gifts at Women & Children’s Hospital in Buffalo.

Toys, gifts and gift cards were purchased through a generous donation of \$1,500 from the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSOPBA) Union. The CO’s used these funds to go on shopping sprees in support of this worthwhile project. One of them took advantage of Black Friday deals in order to come up as many gifts as possible. She also donated \$88 of her own money in order to purchase an iPad for one of the hospital’s floors. “I just couldn’t pass up a deal like that, and it was for a good cause,” she said.

The other two CO’s took this opportunity to teach their children about the importance of giving and brought them on their shopping trips. One remarked how helpful her son was in selecting appropriate gifts for the pre-teens and teenagers. The other reported how disappointed her 4-year

old daughter was when she found out that she wouldn’t be able to deliver the toys herself because of the hospital’s visiting restrictions. “She was really looking forward to giving the kids these presents in person,” the officer said, “but she was still very proud to have helped by picking them out and sorting them.”

Toys and a few monetary donations from various facility civilian staff and their families that chose to remain anonymous; they only wanted to support the officers’ efforts. After the gifts had been distributed, the CO’s then presented hospital staff with a check donation in the amount of \$1,200 from NYSOPBA to be used for the Child Life Program at the hospital. With these funds, the program will be able to provide similar services and activities along with smiles to ailing kids and their parents long after the holidays have passed.



After the toys were distributed, Correction Officers Malek, Happel and Kelly presented Children’s Life Program Coordinator, Ms. Young, with a check for \$1,200 that was donated to the program by NYSOPBA.