



## **"Dusty Elves" Spread Holiday Cheer**

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Children at shelters and group homes around Flagstaff received a little extra dose of holiday cheer this past season in the form of beautiful, old-fashioned wooden toys, handmade by Ecological Restoration Institute students, staff, and friends. For the second year in a row, a dedicated group of amateur woodworkers gathered on

weekends and

evenings during

September, October,

and November in a

private wood shop,

using donated wood



and their own creativity to design, construct, and finish a variety of cars, trucks, and trains for donation to needy children around Flagstaff.

The Dusty Elves came into being in late 2005 with a donation of surplus wood, a dozen or so volunteers, and the tools in a well-outfitted shop. During the first few meetings, the Elves gathered to design a series of automobiles and train cars, creating templates that could then be used to produce many copies of each type. During the next few sessions pieces were rough-cut from the wood stock, machine-sanded, routed to remove sharp corners, drilled, and assembled into their (almost) finished forms. The



last few construction steps included laboriously hand-sanding the pieces, applying a mineral oil or polyurethane finishing coat, and attaching the wheels and axles. More ERI volunteers then helped to design, print, and attach tags to the toys identifying them as coming from the "Dusty Elves Workshop."

The project has been a joy for all involved, and has made a lot of children very happy. During the holiday seasons of 2005 and 2006, the Dusty Elves constructed and donated about 300 toys to children at locations around Flagstaff, including Sharon Manor, Hope Cottage, and the Flagstaff Family Food Center.

Our hope is to continue the project each year using more donated wood and supplies, and to spread holiday cheer to Flagstaff's needy children for a long time to come.

