Getting into focus

Jaquelin Chavez, 6, gets her eye prescription measured by Program Coordinator Lara Rich on Sunday during the Santa Barbara Eyeglass Factory’s annual Kid’s Day event.

Annual event provides eyeglasses for kids

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Christmas came to Milpas Street early this year as over 100 children received free eye sight exams Sunday during Kids Day at the Santa Barbara Eyeglass Factory.

The 23rd annual event was hosted in partnership Surgical Eye Expeditions International, a Santa Barbara non-profit that works to repair vision locally and worldwide through cataract surgery.

Families started lining up at 9 a.m. for an examination at the offices of Dr. Barry Mast, then walked next door to the Eyeglass Factory where their prescription was filled free of charge.

With an eyeglass laboratory on the premises the patients only had to wait an hour before they could take home their new glasses.

While they waited to receive their new eyewear, the children were treated to refreshments, face painting and a visit from Santa Claus. The American Indian Health Services Clinic on Wheels was also present to enroll children into the Gateway Health Insurance program and, for the first time at Kids Day, provide dental care.

According to Eyeglass Factory founder Rick Feldman, the goal of the event is to provide children in low income families with the ability to see clearly in school.

“This one day is just the tip of the iceberg. We’re able to see to it that kids in school can achieve their full potential. They can’t do that without the ability to see clearly,”

Mr. Feldman says students in need of glasses can get a voucher from their school nurse that’s good for a free pair of glasses, through the Eyeglass Factory’s Right to Sight Program, all year round.

The program distributes approximately 10 pairs of glasses a day free of charge.

“When the kids get their glasses we tell them we believe that some of you will lose your glasses or break your glasses,” laughed Mr. Feldman.

“But we want them to see in school so they can come back and we’ll give them another pair.”

SEE International’s primary mission is restoring sight around the world, but the organization provides additional exams or surgery for local students if they’re needed.

“Since we’ve always been based out of Santa Barbara we also take care of people that have no other ability to get care in our own country,” said SEE International President Randal Avotio, who estimates the organization treats 1,500 local patients per year.

First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal called the event an annual symbol of the holidays. “It’s about community. To see business step up and businesses provide these services to the community is the best feeling.”

For more information on the Right to Sight program visit http://eyeglassfactory.com

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