

## San Bernardino firefighters step up for Westside Steppers

Wesley G. Hughes, Staff Writer  
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SAN BERNARDINO - It was in 1991, not quite 20 years ago, and "the gangs were fighting and the kids were killing each other," said Glenda Martin-Robinson, founder and director of the Westside Steppers Drill Team and Drum Squad.

The place was an apartment development at California and 19th Street, said Martin-Robinson. "I asked the Lord why he didn't stop the killing and I heard him say, 'Unless you give me hands, I can't touch you. And unless you let me have your feet, I can't walk with you.' When he said that, I knew I could do it."

It was difficult to tell Wednesday night at the Rudy Hernandez Community Center downtown who was having more fun, the Westside Steppers or the San Bernardino Professional Firefighters, who came to their rescue in time for their next parade.



Firefighter Jason Serrano, center, has a laugh with Westside Steppers Laila Neal, 7, left, and Jakisha Crudup, 9, right, during a pizza party at the Rudy Hernandez Community Center in San Bernardino February 2, 2011. The San Bernardino City Fire Department presented the group with new uniforms and equipment. The group will perform at this weekend's Black History Parade. *(Gabriel Luis Acosta, Staff Photographer)*

That event is Saturday: the city's Black History Parade. And the Steppers' uniforms, drum heads and drumsticks were showing wear.

Somehow the Steppers' dilemma reached the firefighters and soon Martin-Robinson received an e-mail telling her to make a wish list of things they needed. She made the list and another e-mail said to make it longer.

She knew the Lord was touching and walking and helping her Steppers.

"That's how good God has been to these kids," Martin-Robinson said.

Fire Capt. Jeff English explained how the firefighters got involved.

"We have a committee that decides how our contributions are made," he said. "For years, we gave to the Arrowhead United Way, which is a great cause, but we are members of this community and we wanted our contributions to go to our community."

Firefighters spokesman Tom Rubio said the Steppers were chosen to receive a contribution of \$2,500 "because you help people make good life choices. We applaud you for that."

Telling the Steppers to "break a leg" at Saturday's parade, he added, "You are going to influence the whole city."

The Steppers group is so popular with its young members that parents use it to guarantee that homework gets done, Martin-Robinson said.

The Steppers put on a drill-team and drumming show on Wednesday night to the delight of the firefighters, who put on a surprise pizza party for the Steppers to present them their gifts.

There were shouts and cheers and applause as the team showed some of their moves to syncopated drum beats. First the older girls and then the tykes. And then a couple of encores.

Martin-Robinson will take kids as young as 4 and as old as 21. Some of the Steppers and drummers are members way past 21. James Frink, 38, has been with the Steppers since the beginning.

Both Frink and Martin-Robinson remember when the then 18-year-old drove up in his battered car and said, "I hear you are starting a drill team." When it was confirmed, "I headed for my neighborhood."

And Martin-Robinson remembers him driving back with a whole car full of kids.

Asked why he was still with the Steppers, Frink answered, "I enjoy it. I mentor them."

He told of having two day jobs.

"I work at Disneyland as a shift manager and I'm a program specialist in gymnastics at Warm Springs Elementary School. I also teach cheerleading.

"I work with the kids a lot. That's what I like to do."

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