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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### COUNTY HOLDS OPERATION HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE

**MERCED** – The Merced County Human Services Agency will be holding its 2008 Holiday Gift Drive on Wednesday, December 3, 2008 from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm, at the County Administration Building parking lot, located at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and M Street. The Gift Drive will collect toys and gifts for disadvantaged children and teens in our area. Gifts are also being accepted at local area retailers including the Starbucks store on Main Street in Merced and the local Firestone dealership located on Olive Avenue, next to Gottshalks. Gift barrels are located at these locations to accept donations throughout the holidays.

*“As part of our outreach to needy families and foster children, the Human Services Agency is accepting gift donations this holiday season,” commented Ana Pagan, Director of the Merced County Human Services Agency. “With the economic downturn, more families are facing a difficult holiday season. Please consider how you can help, and participate in the genuine spirit of the holidays – helping others.”*

There are currently over 600 children in foster care and many others who will be without gifts this holiday season. HSA is accepting new, unwrapped toys and gifts for children and teens ages 0-18. In addition to the gift drive drop off day on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, gifts can be dropped off at the HSA Main Office, located at 2115 West Wardrobe Avenue in Merced, through December 16<sup>th</sup>. HSA can also arrange for pick up of any donated items. Please call 385-3000, ext. 5285 for more information or to arrange pick up of gifts or other items.

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