Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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First Friday Twin Cities is hoping its partygoers are in the giving mood come Dec. 7.

The once-a-month event catering to area urban professionals is asking its attendees to bring new, unwrapped toys to December's event at 7 Sushi Ultralounge and Skybar, 700 Hennepin Ave., downtown Minneapolis. The toys will be distributed to needy children throughout the metro.

For First Friday giving back is nothing new. Previous events have featured clothing and food drives. Debonaire McNeal, sole proprietor of First Friday Twin Cities, said the monthly gathering needs to be about more than just partying.

"The main goal is to galvanize the African-American community so we can address the needs of our community," said McNeal. "It's about us helping us."

McNeal, who is one of the better-known promoters in the area, said his goal is to collect 300 new toys at this month's event. "Every year I want to increase that number by 100," said McNeal.

McNeal said he has already formed a partnership with the Minneapolis Public Schools and is registering First Friday revelers to serve as mentors for students in the district. In addition, he said he hopes to use the social gathering as a means to bring awareness to other issues affecting the African-American community such as diabetes and high blood pressure. McNeal suffers from both ailments.

First Friday Twin Cities had seen lean times in years prior, but under the direction of McNeal it has recaptured much of its following within that past few years. Three years ago, McNeal teamed with Tasha George to take over the event that is independent of other First Fridays throughout the nation. McNeal took sole direction of First Friday Twin Cities a year ago, but said George still has an advisory role with the company.

This upcoming event takes place on Friday, Dec. 7 from 9 p.m. – 2 a.m. and is free to the public. There will be a drop-off bin for toys. The event is co-sponsored by the Minneapolis Public Schools' 100 Strong campaign, Seven Sushi, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Prokop Insurance and Insight News. The host committee includes James Burroughs, Pamela Weems, Johnny Opara, Delphanie Daniels, Jermaine Cork, Nardo Williams, Natalie Marrow and Eric Goodlow.