SECOND GOLD COIN RECEIVED: Alton Salvation Army remains hopeful of making its goal

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - The Salvation Army bell-ringing campaign is nearing its close and coordinator **Greg Gelzinnis** is pulling out all the stops to try to get to the $99,000 goal.

Gelzinnis said he wants to light the Alton's Salvation Army star signifying the end of the bell-ringing campaign and that would still take some dollars. At last count, the Army

stood at $67,451.66, still a ways from the goal with the kettle campaign concluding on Thursday. He is hopeful for some large last-minute donations.

Gelzinnis sees the star as “a visible sign that represents the hope and possibilities to all who the Army serves.”

In an effort to make the “final push” to light the star, and to shed light on hunger and homelessness in the greater Alton area, Gelzinnis is going to engage in a 24-hour fast and will be perched in a lift from 2 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 23, until the campaign ends or the star is lit at 2 p.m.

on Thursday, Dec. 24.

Lt. Bryan Ellison, “Greg’s belief in our mission, in the clients that we serve, and in what lighting our star symbolizes for this community has been unwavering since our goal was announced back in October.” Ellison added, “Lt. Teri and I are so honored to serve in this community and so appreciate Greg’s leadership and the efforts made by each and every bell ringer this season.”

A **second gold coin** was found in a kettle last weekend for the Alton Salvation Army and Gelzinnis said to his knowledge that is the first time two have been donated by the same person in a Christmas season. He and the rest of the Salvation Army officials in

Alton thanked the kind person who delivers the coins each holiday season with special notes.

There are sure to be some festivities for those who come by the Army Headquarters on Alby Street.

Coordinator Gelzinnis said, “Those coming down to the Headquarters to make a ‘star-lighting’ contribution will be able to enjoy some hot chocolate or coffee and a snack from the canteen.”

Gelzinnis also mentioned, “A very special soldier and kettle will be standing near the tree and when folks place their contribution in the kettle they will be in for a surprise.” Other local celebrities may also join in on the festivities… the mayor, police and fire chiefs and Advisory Board Members and of course, the official Tree of Lights family, the Botterbush’s. “

Lt. Bryan Ellision shared that “If Greg goes up for 24 hours, I guess I will have to join him…at least part of the time!”

Behind the fun and festivities, there remains the urgent need. Alton Corps Social Service Director, **Holly Allen** said, “The majority of our local programs rely directly on our community’s support. “We have already served over 2,500 families here in our area who come to us for help with obtaining life’s basic needs.

“Many are the working poor, struggling to make ends meet and provide for their children, as well as, low-income seniors with only Social Security who are caught up in this struggle too. We also have had over 250 families that we have served just this Christmas season and families are still coming in…raising this money and lighting our star is critical for us to be able to continue to provide these services…it’s a lifeline.”

Gelzinnis shared in closing, “Our Red Kettle locations will continue to be manned through Thursday, Dec. 24 at 2:00 p.m. and slots are still available and may be reserved at www.ringbells.org . Those wishing to get in on the action and not able to make it by the Alby headquarters may contribute on-line by going to www.onlineredkettle.org/alton, “ He said with encouragement, “If we each do our part, we can change lives right here in the Riverbend…come join us!”

Recently, the Salvation Army had its food and toys giveaway for Christmas and several in the region were helped. One man said it made all the difference in the world for him and his family to have the turkey and food to have a Christmas dinner. He said he had lost his job over the last few months and desperately needed help, which the Army provided.

Gelzinnis said everyone is just one problem away from being on their knees and dabbled in discomfort financially.He admires the people who donate their time and money to the Salvation Army.

“You hear stories and one that stands out is a man that gave a half-million dollars to the Salvation Army,” he said. “He said he did that as a result of the Army being present when he was in the war and they provided comfort on the other side of the world. For parents that are trying to find a way to provide a toy or food at Christmas time, the Salvation Army makes such a difference. I can’t imagine having nothing to give a child at Christmas. I don’t think that should ever happen in this country.”

Anyone wishing to contribute to the Salvation Army in Alton should stop by the office on Alby or call 618-465-7764.