

# Light it up: Salvation Army begins Tree of Lights campaign with community dinner

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**ALTON - The Alton Salvation Army Corps** celebrated its second year of having a living tree of its own to light Wednesday night at its Booth House, located at 525 Alby St. in Alton.

The tree was lit fully Wednesday evening around 6:30 p.m., but will not be displayed in full colored lights again, unless the Salvation Army's Tree of Lights kettle drive campaign reaches this year's \$85,000 goal. The goal is less than last year's ambitious \$99,000, but **Salvation Army Kettle Coordinator Greg Gelzinnis** said it is a notch above last year's collected donations of \$83,000.

"The tree is kind of a new tradition out here," Gelzinnis said. "It will be lit fully tonight to start the campaign, but we will use the colored lights and thermometer next to it to chart our progress to our goal. Each foot is equivalent to about \$5,000."

During the ceremony, a special dinner was served to the community with the assistance of Abundant Life Church, who provided the food and the serving staff. Gelzinnis said the dinner was open to the community and had many people assisted by its Booth House dining with other members of the community and Abundant Life Church. **Alton Mayor Brant Walker** volunteered his time to serve food at the dinner, which Gelzinnis said served a couple hundred people a free Thanksgiving dinner.

"It's humbling when you come out here and see so many in need," Walker said. "Especially given that we don't think of how many people are in need as often as we should. I came out to help serve some food and light the Tree of Lights."

The Tree of Lights chairs were **Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick and his wife Linda McCormick.**

Gelzinnis said the Salvation Army is still searching for volunteers for this year's bell ringing campaign. He said as many as 2,000 people are required to fully staff each post during the holiday season. Interested parties are invited to take an open space on the Salvation Army's kettle schedule, which can be done at [www.ringbells.org](http://www.ringbells.org). Gelzinnis said special priority should be given to the three area Schnuck's locations. Schnuck's had previously banned the Salvation Army's bell ringers, among other solicitors. Gelzinnis said, since the ban was lifted earlier in the season, volunteers are needed.

