

Goal exceeded: Alton Salvation Army Corps celebrates successful Red Kettle Campaign

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - While the St. Louis Salvation Army failed to reach its kettle campaign goal by as much as \$200,000, the **Alton Salvation Army Corps** exceeded their goal by more than \$10,000.

Alton Salvation Army Corps Kettle Coordinator Greg Gelzinnis held all in attendance in suspense during a Saturday afternoon press conference to reveal the official number. Just before 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Gelzinnis announced the kettle campaign has fetched more than \$95,000, which was well above their set goal of \$85,000. Gelzinnis credits the success of Alton's campaign to its experimental move toward volunteer bell-ringers instead of paid bell-ringers utilized in most of the St. Louis Metro Area.

"Volunteer bell-ringers give people a sense of relationship and community with people ringing the bells," he said. "It was a bit of an experiment when we first did it, and it's taken us a few years since to reach our goals, but it's worked."

When the Alton Salvation Army Corps made the decision to have volunteer-based bell-ringers three years ago, the decision had some pros and cons. As a plus, the Alton Salvation Army Corps was able to save as much as \$40,000-\$50,000 a campaign and allow people to see their friends, neighbors and community pillars ringing bells - people who are hard to walk past without dropping in some change into the kettles. The downside, however, is not all of the 14 stations are manned from 10 a.m.-8 p.m. six days a week for five weeks at a time.

With this year's totals, Gelzinnis said the move towards volunteers proved its value. Firefighters from the Alton Fire Department used a ladder truck to raise the bar and light the star on the Christmas tree outside the Salvation Army's Booth House, located at 525 Alby St. Alton Salvation Army Corps Officers Lts. Brian and Teri Ellison echoed Gelzinnis's praises of Alton's move toward volunteer bell-ringers.



"It was a scary decision for Teri and I to decide for our corps to go to all-volunteer bell-ringers three years ago, but today really endorses that decision," Brian Ellison said in a release.

"The heart and spirit of our volunteer team is truly unlike anything that I have experiences," Teri Ellison said in the release.

The Ellisons and Gelzinnis thanked all the bell-ringers, with special thanks to Dane Rockafellow, who has been ringing bells for 19 years, and retired Navy officer Larry Goss, who Gelzinnis said called him nearly daily inquiring about the proximity to the goal this year.

This year's Red Kettle Campaign continued until 2 p.m. Saturday afternoon. Gelzinnis said a kettle at which he stood post with the Ellisons Saturday morning was stuffed with nearly \$1,000 at the Godfrey Schnucks. He said another kettle from the Wood River Wal-Mart delivered another \$1,000 toward their goals. Anonymous donations of \$5,000 and \$10,000 from members of the community also helped secure the historic amount

raised this year, Gelzinnis said. As of last Tuesday, the kettle campaign raised more than \$63,000. That money was aided with just below \$1,400 from the Pork Steaktacular, a brainchild publicity stunt from Gelzinnis.

"This has been an emotional day for me," Gelzinnis said in a release. "Fourteen months ago, Lts. Brian and Teri Ellison took a chance on a guy who didn't feel all his gifts were used up. He just needed a chance, a little hope, something that the Salvation Army is so well-known for in our community. Lighting this star today means everything to me. Our community and this corps deserve to be able to celebrate and I couldn't be more proud."

The Tree of Lights campaign, which was illustrated by the Christmas tree capped with the celebratory star, was chaired this year by **Mike and Linda McCormick of Godfrey**. Mike McCormick is the Mayor of Godfrey, and volunteered to take shifts at the Godfrey Schnucks for a few shifts during the campaign. They described Gelzinnis as "the backbone" of this year's campaign and said they were very proud of the people of the Riverbend area for all they donated, a sentiment shared by Gelzinnis."

"To every man, woman and child that contributed in some way to the success of this year's campaign, may God richly bless you as you have so richly blessed us and may you and your families have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," he said.



