



United Way's Community Christmas kicks off to benefit Riverbend community during the holidays

November 9 2012 2:30 PM

WOOD RIVER, IL (November 5, 2012) — The annual Community Christmas donation drive is in full swing for the holiday season as festive boxes can be spotted in businesses throughout the Riverbend community and surrounding areas. The Southwest Illinois Division of United Way's annual event began Monday, November 5, with boxes being delivered to participating businesses to collect donated items.

Donations to be placed in the boxes include non-perishable food items, new clothes for all ages, new winter weather necessities like gloves, hats and scarves, blankets, baby care items, hygiene items, and new toys. Items received will go to 14 local agencies to help those in need of these items during the holiday season. Many of these organizations greatly depend on the donations from United Way's Community Christmas to help those in the area have a great holiday.

All the items and monetary donations for Community Christmas stay right here in the area to help local families in need. Mary Jo Kratschmer, Community Christmas chair, participated in the event last year and said, "As I helped sort donations from local businesses, churches, and organizations, I imagined how happy some little girl was going to be to get that Barbie doll, how relieved a new mother would be to get that pack of diapers. I hope those who donate know the good they are doing and that their donations stay in our community. They help make Christmas for many, many people."

Cash donations are also accepted and should be sent to United Way at 263 South Sixth Street, Wood River, IL 62095 and marked as Attn: Community Christmas. Monetary donations will go towards buying items on the donation list that were not received in large quantities or for certain age groups. "Last year, we were short on items for teenagers, so we used the monetary donations to purchase those items and any other items that we were short on," said Dawna Gilbreath, Community Christmas coordinator.

The drive runs until Thursday, December 13, when boxes will be collected from organizations and taken to Lewis and Clark Community College's Family Learning Center where item sorting will take place. Last year, Community Christmas brought in more than 50 volunteers, 100 boxes, and received roughly 20,000 items donated.

Gilbreath is confident that the donations and participation will exceed last year's numbers. "This is a community that is filled with people who genuinely care about the needs of others," she said.

In addition to donating items, volunteers for a variety of activities are needed and are essential to the success of United Way's Community Christmas. "We have several ways for volunteers of all ages to get involved, and it's going to be a really fun and rewarding experience for all who participate," Gilbreath said.

Volunteer opportunities include picking up donation-filled boxes once Community Christmas comes to a close, dropping them off at the sorting location, and then sorting and loading the thousands of items donated for pick-up by the agencies.

In addition, it's not too late to help out by requesting to have a box placed in a business or organization. Most boxes will be delivered to organizations on November 5, but requests for boxes after this date are welcome and will be fulfilled.

For those interested in donating items, volunteering or for more information, call United Way's Southwest Illinois Division at 618-251-0072. Those who wish to be involved can also sign up on United Way's volunteer website at www.unitedwaystlcares.org by signing up for a free account and selecting the Community Christmas option.

A complete list of organizations that have boxes for donations will be published in The Telegraph. Donations can also be dropped off during regular business hours at the Southwest Illinois Division of United Way at 263 South Sixth Street, Wood River, IL.

About United Way of Greater St. Louis

United Way supports more than 170 health and human service agencies located throughout a 16-county area in Missouri and Illinois. One in three people in our community receive services that strengthen families, help the elderly, keep children healthy and safe, and build stronger neighborhoods. For more information, contact 314-421-0700 or visit www.stl.unitedway.org.