

Collecting for a Community Christmas

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - This year's United Way Community Christmas will most likely match, or possibly exceed, last year's collection of approximately 32,000 items.

Those items have been brought together Thursday at Main Street United Methodist Church in Alton for sorting. They were collected from boxes placed around the Riverbend and Edwardsville areas, and are destined for several locations in the region in need this holiday season. Collected items include toys, food, clothing and money, which was used by the United Way of Greater St. Louis to attain even more gifts and needed items for the community.

United Way of Greater St. Louis Public Relations Manager Erin Smith and Community Christmas Committee Chairperson Martha Morse were among several volunteers from across the area sorting collected goods into specific boxes. Morse said as many as 16 area organizations will benefit from collections this year.

"We sent out applications to different places, and asked them about their needs as well as the number of people they serve and their geographical boundaries," Morse said. "We also ask if they are receiving assistance from any other organizations as well, so we can determine their need."

Smith said dozens of volunteers from Alton, Roxana and Edwardsville High Schools assisted with the sorting of clothing, toys, food, books and other items. They were joined by about 10 volunteers from PAC-UP and staff from 1st Mid America Credit Union, where Morse is employed.

The vast majority of the items coming in are from community donations into the boxes, which were assembled by students from Edwardsville High School. Approximately 125 boxes were placed around the area.

"Some places had more than one box, though," Smith said. "I think Edwardsville High School requested 20 of them."

Alton High School had 20 boxes, Edwardsville had 25 and Phillips 66 had a dozen.

Other community members and staff from the United Way of Greater St. Louis also assisted with the sorting efforts, and John Feder Trucking of New Athens, Illinois assisted by offering a trailer to haul gifts purchased by the United Way of Greater St. Louis from Toys R Us.

The organizations benefiting from this drive are:

- 100 Black Men of Alton
- Alton Boys and Girls Club
- Calhoun County Council for Senior Citizens
- Caritas Family Solutions
- Catholic Charities of Madison County
- Catholic Children's Home
- Centerstone
- Children's Home and Aid
- Crisis Food Center, Inc.
- Illinois Center for Autism
- Oasis Women's Center
- Operation Blessings
- Riverbend Family Ministries
- Riverbend Head Start Family Services
- Salvation Army
- Village of Royal Lakes