

Alton Salvation Army hoping for big weekend for its Red Kettle Campaign

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
December 8 2017 3:02 PM



ALTON - Last year, the Alton Corps of the Salvation Army exceeded its own expectations when it raised more than \$100,000 after setting its goal at \$85,000 for the massive Red Kettle Campaign.

This year, Kettle Coordinator Greg Gelzinnis said the Salvation Army has upped its goal to a hefty \$90,000. As of last Wednesday, Dec. 6, Gelzinnis said the corps has raised \$33,785.26, which is as much as \$1,500 below its donations at this time last year. Gelzinnis blames the weather at this point, and is optimistic about the collections as the season grows closer to Christmas - and hopefully gets colder.

"It's always the case people get more generous the closer we get to Christmas," Gelzinnis said. "The weather has been so wacky, it's not easy to think about Christmas when it's 70 degrees out there, but maybe it will get a bit easier when there are flurries in the air."

Gelzinnis also hopes this coming weekend's culmination of local high school competitions will generate even more revenue to overcome this minor slump. East Alton Wood River, Roxana, Civic Memorial and Alton High School students have been competing to see who can raise the most money for the past two weeks. That competition will culminate this weekend, Gelzinnis said, at the same time as a bi-state competition called "The Mascot Challenge" begins.

"Saturday is also the Mascot Challenge," Gelzinnis said. "Schools from the entire bi-state area are competing. It's ran by our divisional headquarters. High schools are seeing who can raise the most money in the bi-state area. Those kids will be at area Schnucks and Wal-Mart locations from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Saturday."

Another reason cited by Gelzinnis for the \$1,500 decrease is a "volunteer slump." He said as many as 600 time slots need to be filled by volunteers, who can register for a bell-ringing time at <http://btr.im/iw8w>.

"If folks have a couple of hours to spend ringing bells, that is a couple of more hours worth of donations," he said.

Gelzinnis also addressed a movement across social media aimed to discredit the Salvation Army for discrimination against the LGBTQ community as well as women working for the organization. In these postings, people ask others to not donate to the Salvation Army, because of these allegations.

In response, Gelzinnis did say the Church of the Salvation Army is a biblical-based organization and, therefore, does not agree with the homosexual lifestyle, but insisted the social services provided by the Salvation Army did not discriminate against anyone.

"We will help anyone with our services, regardless of creed, color, sexual orientation, gender or what have you," he said.

Some of those social programs offered by the organization include Pathways of Hope, which allows single-parent families to have a case worker assigned to them to assist with financial planning and life skills.

The Alton Salvation Army Booth House also offers rent and utility services to those in need, while the resources are available, and a food pantry every Tuesday morning from 9-11 a.m. and every Friday afternoon from 1-3 p.m.

That Salvation Army Booth House, located at 525 Alby in Alton, is also the only homeless shelter for men in Madison County, and offers as many as 14 beds to those who are in need.

Money raised by the Red Kettle Campaign within the Riverbend Area, including in Alton, Bethalto, Godfrey, East Alton and Wood River, stays within the Riverbend area to provide services to local people. Gelzinnis said the Red Kettle Campaign is the most significant fundraiser for the continuance of those services, not only in Alton, but across the nation, and even internationally.

As always, Gelzinnis has big plans to raise awareness and funds for this year's Red Kettle Campaign. In previous years, Gelzinnis has stayed in a cherry picker outside the booth house to bring awareness to the plight of homeless men during cold weather, and has hosted a "Pork-Steak-A-Palooza," during which pork steak dinners are provided by the Salvation Army Alton Corps for a minimal fee.

This year, Gelzinnis said there may even be delivery available for large orders. More information will be forthcoming by early next week. This year's "Pork-Steak-A-Palooza" will take place from Dec. 14-15.