

Salvation Army: One week in and donations are up for Red Kettles

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – Not even a week into this year's Red Kettle Campaign, the Alton Branch of the Salvation Army is already three percent higher in donations than they were at this same time last year.

Lieutenant Steven Reinier, who is running this year's campaign with his wife, Lieutenant Lily Reinier, said he credits the overall generosity of the people of the Riverbend for the increase in donations. Currently, he said the organization has bell-ringers posted at local Schnucks stores, Walgreens, and Wal-Marts. He also said he has a plethora of volunteers – both individuals and groups – who are willing to stand outside those businesses with the iconic red smock, red kettle and (usually) gold bells. In fact, people are already volunteering for next year's kettle drive slots.

This year's goal is \$90,000, and the Alton Branch of the Salvation Army is not an organization which misses its goals. Most years, the star on top of its Tree of Lights is lit in celebration of their original goal not only being met but exceeded.

“All that money gets used for social services,” Lt. Steven Reinier said. “It generates our operating services we do, like our food pantry, warming center and financial assistance we give to the community. Some is set aside for grants we apply for to help people in the community with their bills.”

The warming center he mentioned currently only operates from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. every day. He said it gives people in the community a place to stay warm while having small refreshments of snacks and drinks. In the future, Lt. Steven Reinier said he would like to see these people have access to a full meal instead of only snacks. This campaign could help them do it.

While the Alton Branch of the Salvation Army does operate a booth house for people in need of emergency housing (in fact, it is the only homeless shelter operating for men in Madison County), the Red Kettle Drive does not exactly funnel into that aspect of the Salvation Army's mission. Lt. Steve Reinier said it was under a different branch, but added that people leaving the Booth house for their own apartment do benefit from the community's generosity.

In December, local area high schools will have a mascot competition in order to see which school can raise the most donations in the area. Lt. Steve Reinier said other organizations have also volunteered for different weekends in hopes of driving more people to donate.



Outside of the Red Kettle Campaign, the Alton Branch of the Salvation Army is also hosting several “Angel Trees” around the community, which encourage people to donate still-boxed toys and other items for children for the purpose of ensuring kids who could not otherwise afford one can have a decent holiday season.

Schnucks locations across the St. Louis area are also doing a “round up” donation in which customers are invited to round their purchases to the next nearest dollar and give their coinage to the Salvation Army. The different area branches will not see that income until January, however.

Lt. Steven Reinier also addressed one of the main issues people have against the Salvation Army nationwide – perceived discrimination against LGBTQIA folks. He said he could not comment on the official over-arching policy of the entire Salvation Army, which is a Christian-affiliated organization, but said the Alton Branch of the Salvation Army has a strict policy against discrimination of any sort.

“I cannot comment on the official stance of the Salvation Army, but we have a very, very strict non-discrimination policy,” he said. “Anyone who comes in for help gets the help they need that we can give. We do not discriminate against people in need.”

The official website of the Salvation Army also paints the organization as pro-LGBTQIA. It stated the following regarding its non-discrimination policy:

Each year, thanks to generous donations, The Salvation Army serves more than 25 million Americans – or one person every second – from a variety of backgrounds. People who come to us for assistance will be served according to their need and our capacity to help – regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

It continues to say the organization also does not discriminate against hires and said many people in the LGBTQIA support their mission:

The Salvation Army embraces employees of many different faiths and orientations. Our hiring practices are open to all, and we adhere to all relevant employment laws, providing domestic and partner benefits accordingly

Many people – including those in the LGBT community – support us with time and financial resources because of a common cause and commitment: To serve people in need.