

Partners Needed to Host Boxes for United Way's Annual Community Christmas Drive

October 22 2013 3:42 PM



**COMMUNITY
CHRISTMAS**



United Way's annual Community Christmas donation drive is gearing up for its kick-off on November 4 to collect items for those in need during the holidays. Community Christmas is asking for businesses and organizations to help families in the Riverbend area this year by serving as a donation drop-off location.

All it takes to be a donation drop-off location is to have a box, or even two, located in the main entrance or another easily accessible area where anyone can drop off items during business hours. The boxes are provided courtesy of Phillips 66 Wood River Refinery and are of no cost to host organizations.

"Our goal this year is to have more than 100 boxes for donations in the community at different locations where anyone can drop off items throughout the day," said Dawna Gilbreath, Community Christmas coordinator. "Last year, we had about 117 boxes out in the community, but we always hope to have more boxes so that no matter where you are located, there is a drop-off box close by."

Community Christmas begins Monday, November 4, when boxes will be delivered to participating organizations and will wrap up on Thursday, December 12, when boxes will be collected and taken to a central location for sorting. 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 of course new toys. 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.

Mary Jo Kratschmer, 2013 Community Christmas chair, emphasized the importance of having these items to give to families in need throughout the community this holiday season. "When we think Christmas, we think toys, and of course we want to bring smiles to the faces of children," she said. "But having the basic needs items like hats, gloves, coats, and food are so essential, too, in helping adults and the families as a whole, this holiday season."

Last year, Community Christmas collected more than 20,000 items for the community. Donations received will go to support 13 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. "Community Christmas is able to reach hundreds of people with the more than 20,000 items collected and distributed to our recipient agencies," Gilbreath said. "By distributing our items to several organizations throughout the community, we are able to serve so many different people with a diverse range of needs."

Kratschmer is confident that the donations and participation will exceed last year's numbers. "I know the community will respond generously once again this holiday season," she said. "Each year I've been involved with Community Christmas, I've been amazed at the generosity of people helping others in the Riverbend area. It's so moving to see how people in our area want to help those in need have a brighter Christmas."

Besides needing business and organizations to host donation boxes, volunteers for a variety of activities are also essential to the success of United Way's Community Christmas. "We need volunteers who are able to pick up donations, sort and count items, and even assist with loading donations for the agencies who will pick up the items for their programs," Gilbreath said. "Each year we have such wonderful volunteers who show just how caring our community is, but we can always use more to make the process even better."

All volunteer opportunities include prepping the boxes with festive signs and labels, delivering boxes to host sites, picking up donation-filled boxes once Community Christmas comes to a close, and sorting and loading the thousands of items donated for pick-up by the agencies.

For those interested in hosting a box, volunteering or for more information, call United Way's Southwest Illinois Division at 618-251-0072.

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.