

Riverbend Area Showcases Generosity Once Again in United Way's Community Christmas Program

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**COMMUNITY
CHRISTMAS**



The annual Community Christmas donation drive for the Riverbend community once again brought in thousands of items for those in need during the holiday season. The drive wrapped up on Thursday, December 12, when 117 boxes were picked up from local businesses, dropped off at a central location, and then were sorted for distribution to the 14 receiving agencies.

This year, Community Christmas brought in 16,312 items, including non-perishable food, clothes, winter weather necessities like gloves, hats and scarves, blankets, baby care items, hygiene items, and new toys.

On Thursday, the total item count was 14,871 individual items. Several last minute cash donations and item drop-offs from businesses and individuals came through late Thursday and all day Friday, even with some coming in over the weekend. These monetary and item donations will put the total count at over 16,000 items by early next week.

"We had some very generous last minute cash donations, which allowed us to buy hundreds of additional items like gift cards to Schnucks, Dollar General, and a lot of canned food," said Community Christmas Coordinator Dawna Gilbreath. "Even though our total for items donated is lower than last year, our cash donation amount was substantially increased thanks to the generosity of this community once again. So, this will help us even out the amount of donations to help families at the same level we have each year."

The breakdown of items donated as of Thursday, December 12, for different categories include: Toys - 5,382, 40 bikes, Hygiene Items - 2,058, Winter Weather Essentials - 2,800, Coats - 500, Baby Items - 300, Clothes - 1,258, Adults - 147, and Food - 3,827. Cash donations were able to purchase items like Schnucks gift cards, totaling over \$2,000, Shop N Save gift cards, totaling over \$700, as well as several Target and Dollar Tree gift cards.

Mary Jo Kratschmer, Community Christmas chair, said, "Each year I am overcome by the generosity this community has to help those that are less fortunate. Even though our item donation total was down this year from previous years, the thousands of items collected and purchased will go a long way in being able to help so many families in need throughout the Riverbend this holiday season."

The 14 agencies that picked up their items on Friday, December 13, included: Boys and Girls Club of Alton, Catholic Charities of Madison County, Catholic Children's Home, Children's Home and Aid Society, Christian Social Services, Concerned Citizens, Crisis

Food Center, Inc., Lutheran Child and Family Services, Oasis Women's Center, Operation Blessing, Riverbend Community Food Pantry, Riverbend Head Start and Family Services, Salvation Army, and WellSpring Resources.

Dozens of volunteers participated on Thursday and Friday to help pick up the boxes from businesses, unload the many truck-full loads of donations, and sort and count the items for distribution to the agencies. Students from Alton High School were a major part of the volunteer efforts throughout the sorting and loading on Thursday and Friday, and Roxana High School played a big role in prepping the boxes for delivery at the beginning of the program.

The Southwest Illinois Division of United Way of Greater St. Louis and the Community Christmas Committee would like to thank everyone who participated for their generous contributions to help this community have a brighter holiday season.

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