



Community Christmas kicks off Nov. 4 to benefit more than 6,000 in RiverBend community

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The 25th annual Community Christmas donation drive begins Tuesday, November 4, with festive collection boxes being delivered to more than 100 businesses and organizations throughout the RiverBend community. The program, sponsored by the Southwest Illinois Division of United Way of Greater St. Louis and The Telegraph, collects a wide variety of items for those in need throughout the area to make their holiday season bright.

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, cleaning supplies and of course new toys. Items received will go to 15 local agencies to help more than 6,000 people in need during the holiday season.

Cash donations are also accepted and should be sent to United Way at 707 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 270, East Alton, IL 62024 and marked as Attn: Community Christmas. Monetary donations will go towards buying items on the donation list that were not received in large quantities or for certain age groups.. All items and monetary donations for Community Christmas stay in the RiverBend community to help local families in need.

"This is my fourth year being involved with Community Christmas, and each year it continues to grow in giving and the amount of businesses participating," said Mary Jo Kratschmer, Community Christmas chair. "We are thrilled to once again be able to collect thousands of items to help people have a great holiday. What's so special about Community Christmas is that we collect the essential items like non-perishable food and winter coats but also collect the toys so that the kids can have something fun to brighten up their holiday, too."

Community Christmas wraps up on Thursday, December 11, when boxes will be collected from organizations and taken to Main Street United Methodist Church in Alton where item sorting will take place. On Friday, December 12, the 15 recipient agencies will pick up their items to distribute the following week through their various holiday programs.

Last year, Community Christmas collected more than 16,000 items for the community that were distributed through 14 local agencies. Kratschmer is hopeful that the program will bring in even more items this year.

"What's so amazing about the RiverBend community is that when times are tough, they always come through for each other," she said. "I know that this community will once again pull through to help those less fortunate have a bright holiday."

In addition to donating items, volunteers for a variety of activities are needed. Volunteer opportunities include picking up donation-filled boxes once Community Christmas comes to a close, dropping them off at the sorting location, and then sorting and loading the thousands of items for pick-up by the agencies.

For those interested in donating items, hosting a box, volunteering or for more information, call United Way at 618-258-9800. A complete list of organizations that have boxes for donations will be published in The Telegraph throughout the program's duration and can also be found on United Way's website beginning November 5.

About United Way of Greater St. Louis:

United Way of Greater St. Louis mobilizes the community with one goal in mind - helping people live their best possible lives. Located throughout 16 counties in Missouri and Illinois, United Way helps one in three people in the region build a foundation for a good quality of life through basic needs, education, financial stability, health and strong communities. For more information, contact (314) 421-0700 or visit www.helpingpeople.org