

**RIVERBENDER.COM**

# Community Christmas collects more than 17,000 items, thanks community for outpouring of generosity

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**COMMUNITY  
CHRISTMAS**

The annual Community Christmas donation drive for the Riverbend community, sponsored by United Way [www.helpingpeople.org](http://www.helpingpeople.org) and The Telegraph [www.thetelegraph.com](http://www.thetelegraph.com) once again

brought in thousands of items for those in need during the holiday season. This year, Community Christmas collected 17,116 items, including non-perishable food, clothes, winter weather necessities like gloves, hats and scarves, blankets, baby care items, hygiene items, and new toys.

The drive wrapped up on Thursday, December 11, when more than 100 boxes were picked up from local businesses and dropped off at Main Street United Methodist Church in Alton for sorting. On Friday, December 12, 15 local agencies picked up their items to distribute through their holiday programs.

"I am so thrilled and so grateful for the kindness that was demonstrated throughout the entire community during our program," said Dawna Gilbreath, Community Christmas coordinator. "Whether it was the Freer Auto Body Cookies and Cocoa for Christmas, Phillips 66 holiday party, or the dozens of other incredible businesses who hosted a box and individuals who donated items, the outpouring of generosity in the Riverbend is incredible. Thousands of kids and their families will have a great holiday thanks to the many outstanding supporters in our community."

Freer Auto Body remains the top supporter of Community Christmas, with a record donation of \$36,660 to the program. The Freer's annual events like Christmas in July and Cookies and Cocoa for Christmas, in addition to a memorial fund set up in honor of Margaret Freer's mother, all contributed to this total.

"The support from the Freers is truly essential to the success of our program," Gilbreath said. "Margaret and her family are such an excellent example of the generosity of our region. Their giving spirit reminds me of a favorite quote from Coretta Scott King, 'The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members; a heart of grace and a soul generated by love.'"

The 15 agencies that picked up their items on Friday, December 12, included: Boys and Girls Club of Alton, Caritas Family Solutions, Catholic Charities of Madison County, Catholic Children's Home, Children's Home and Aid Society, Crisis Food Center, Inc., Illinois Center for Autism, Lutheran Child and Family Services, Oasis Women's Center, Operation Blessing, Riverbend Family Ministries, Riverbend Head Start and Family Services, Salvation Army, Village of Royal Lakes (Concerned Citizens) 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 and Community Christmas Chair Mary Jo Kratschmer, along with several of her friends, were a major part of the volunteer efforts throughout the sorting and loading on Thursday and Friday.

The Southwest Illinois Division of United Way of Greater St. Louis, The Telegraph 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 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, financial stability, education, health and strong communities. For more information, contact 314-421-0700 or visit [www.helpingpeople.org](http://www.helpingpeople.org).

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