

Edwardsville Police make Christmas brighter for area youth

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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The Edwardsville Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 244 showed their compassion to help area children once again with its fifth annual Christmas with a Cop program Saturday at Burger King and Target in Edwardsville.

The program began with Burger King donating breakfast to children chosen for the program in cooperation with Edwardsville Community School District 7. Afterward, the

children were taken to Target and were given \$200 to spend on holiday gifts and an officer to shop with the entire time. After the gifts were purchased, they were wrapped by the Edwardsville Police Department's Explorer members and other volunteers.

Officer Rick Thompson has been the lead for Edwardsville Fraternal Order of Police on the project this year.

Thompson said the Christmas with a Cop program is "amazing" each year.

"I look forward to it every year," he said. "This is my favorite thing to do as a police officer. Christmas is my time of the year."

Matt Breihan, president of the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge No. 244, said this was the most kids they have been able to serve with 15 children being able to shop with the officers.

Breihan said he and the officers get "an awesome feeling" when they see the smile on kids' faces receiving the gifts.

"We get full support of our program through the Edwardsville School District and the community," he said. "We appreciate people saying thank you; that never gets old for us."

Breihan said anyone who wants to donate to the Christmas program could send in checks that could be applied for next year. Checks should be made out to Fraternal Order of Police Local 244, Christmas with a Cop.

Lt. Chris Byrne said he would never miss this day and it was one of his favorite days of the year.

Some of the Explorers who gift wrapped said seeing this made them even more want to be a police officer one day, which has been one of their goals.

Another one of the younger shoppers said he was so excited to have the things he really wanted for Christmas, so much he almost cried.

Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus even made an appearance and both said seeing the kids' faces light up is what makes it worthwhile for them to be there.

The Edwardsville Fraternal Order of Police raises the majority of funds for the program. This year, the union also received generous contributions from Paula Simmons of Country Companies Insurance, the Bluff City Softball League and other private donors.

I also want to give a big shout out to patrol officer Rick Thompson, who spearheads this committee every year and has done a fantastic job since it started,” Breihan said. “It wouldn’t be what it is today without his help.”

See photo gallery: <https://crm.riverbender.com/index.cfm?id=147&edit§ion=photos>.

