



Smiles On Faces Tell The Story: Hit-N-Run, Riverbender Community Center \$25,000 Toy Giveaway Is Huge Hit

by Brandon Harris

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ALTON - The \$25,000 Hit-N-Run/Riverbender Community Center Toy Giveaway was a big success Friday night with lines backed around the entire Riverbender building and beyond prior to the 7 p.m. opening and a lot of satisfied children and families after it ended.

The Toy Giveaway followed the annual tree lighting at the Lincoln Douglas Square. The Holiday Open House had something for everyone with holiday-themed crafts, a Balloon POP, games, a bake sale, hot cocoa, holiday music, and more. There was no admission charge to the Community Center Open House.

The two donors for the toy giveaway, Dwight Fowler from Hit-N-Run, and John Hentrich from Riverbender.com were very pleased with the turnout and overall success of this event. In just over two hours, 557 people came through the community center to enjoy the free toys and all there was to offer.

The Fowlers, Dwight and his wife Teresa, have been long-time supporters of John Hentrich and the Riverbender Community Center. Both were excited to see hundreds of children receive free toys and all seemed to go away with a strong holiday spirit.

“When Christmas comes around, Hit-and-Run always does something like this,” Dwight Fowler said. “We have increased it for this year.

“John came to me with this opportunity and the idea to split the cost of these toys. We were excited to help make the \$25,000 toy giveaway possible. We had done it for a couple of years now, but not this amount of toys. It went smoothly.

“We have six Hit-N-Run stores and we bought them four years ago. My wife had been working for them since she was 16. This is something Hit-N-Run has done every year giving back to the community for 50 years and we just expanded it. We are going to try to keep making this bigger every year.”

Riverbender.com CEO John Hentrich said, “I’m glad we had such a great turnout and everything went without a hitch. It would not have been possible without all the volunteers and the additional support from Hit-N-Run.”

“We hoped a large percentage of our guests were vaccinated and there were also a lot of face masks here, so hopefully everybody was safe tonight and they just leave with Christmas cheer and toys,” Hentrich said. “We had a good opportunity to buy a couple of truckloads of toys. We hope that opportunity presents itself again next year; we feel it might, but we have no guarantees.”

“We will give away as much as we can every year, and we’ll try to keep the Community Center running until we can get some support from the City of Alton or find someone else willing to help provide these services to the kids and families here in the Riverbend.”

Hentrich said anyone who wanted to give financially to the Community Center or donate their time would both be great. He said the financial donations keep the Community Center operating. Hentrich said there were 30 to 40 volunteers for the toy giveaway and normally 20 on the Community Center's Friday night outings.

Dwight and Teresa Fowler added that it makes your heart feel good to see the kids enjoy this holiday night and have fun.

“Seeing the kids' eyes and smiles on their faces, that is our joy,” they both said.

Photo gallery and more stories about the event to come.











