

# 'Big Hearts' Participate Once Again In Thunderdome Thanksgiving For Kids

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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BETHALTO - The Thunderdome Thanksgiving for Kids has been a huge fundraiser for the Patches and Badges program in the past, and this year continued that trend.

Former police officer Brent Wells, now an investigator for the Simmons Hanly Conroy firm, started the program in 2001. He and Todd Laux, the owner of Pride Fitness, are friends and early on, Todd decided to join him in a major fundraiser.

The two formulated the idea to have clients pay \$100 to perform one of Laux's circuit workouts on Thanksgiving morning. Some don't do the workout on Thanksgiving Day, but still donate to the cause.

Wells described Todd Laux and his many customers as all individuals with "big hearts."

The fundraiser at Pride Fitness is the main fundraiser for Patches and Badges locally. Each year after the Thanksgiving event, police officers from Bethalto, East Alton, Wood River, Roxana, South Roxana, and Alton are able to have officers shop with kids prior to Christmas for presents. Each year, the different school systems involved pick the kids to participate in the program.



One of the heartwarming things about the program, Wells said, is that many of the kids buy their first present for a loved one, mother, father, sibling, or grandparent, rather than for themselves.

Wells said one of the most touching stories he can tell centers on a child who participated in the first year of Patches and Badges in 2001.

“He said his mom and dad were in jail and his grandma was raising him and his siblings,” Wells said. “He asked, 'can I get Grandma and Susie, a neighbor, a vacuum so they can make more money cleaning houses?'" In an emotional fashion, Wells said absolutely the young person was able to buy the vacuum cleaner. That year, Wells made sure the child still had his money to shop for presents for himself.

Wells said Patches and Badges remind everyone involved the same thing: “You have to be thankful for what you have.”

Wells said he is very thankful to Laux and all the others who participated on Thanksgiving Day and made the 2021 fundraiser such a big success.

Last year, the late Pontoon Beach Officer Tyler Timmins and his wife, then fiancée, Linsey, participated in the Patches and Badges Shop with the Cop. Officer Timmins died in the line of duty on October 26, 2021, while approaching a suspect of a stolen vehicle. Wells says looking back, that means so much to all the officers that Tyler and his wife took part and it showed what giving people he and his wife were.









