

Surpasses \$57K: Freer Auto Body's Christmas in July Raises Record Amount Again For Local Families

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Summer is the new season of giving in the Riverbend. Freer Auto Body hosted their 15th annual Christmas in July fundraiser from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Friday, July 21, and it was the most successful fundraiser yet.

The first year, they raised \$2,500. Last year, they donated around \$56,000. Margaret Freer had noted that it would be difficult to top that number, but as donations continued rolling in on Friday, they had surpassed \$57,000 by early afternoon.

The Christmas in July event includes a luncheon and raffle at Freer Auto Body, located at 4512 North Alby Street in Godfrey. All proceeds go to United Way's Community Christmas program, which provides toys, clothing, personal care items and more for families in need during the holiday season.

“This event makes a difference in whether there is something underneath the tree for a child at Christmas or whether there is not,” Margaret Freer said. “We are so appreciative for the support we get for this event. We live in a very caring and giving community. We had so many businesses and individuals step up and help make this event a success.”

Christmas in July is a true family experience; the entire Freer clan gets in on the fun. The day itself is hosted by Margaret’s granddaughters, Taylor and Lily. It was Taylor who came up with the idea 15 years ago.

“Seeing it grow...and how much of an impact it’s made for little kids during Christmas time, it’s great,” Taylor said. “We put it on, but it’s really the community that really makes it happen.”

Taylor explained that she came up with the idea in honor of her uncle David, who passed away when she was young. David loved United Way and their mission, and he was particularly fond of Community Christmas.



When 5-year-old Taylor suggested putting on a lemonade stand to donate to a local charity, the family knew she was on the right track. They organized a luncheon, with all proceeds going to Community Christmas.

Each year, the fundraiser seems to keep getting more popular and this year, it raised a record of more than \$57,000. This makes the Freers agree that David would be proud.

“Just to be able to see this grow, I know he would really like it,” Taylor said of her uncle.

Taylor and Margaret stress that the event couldn’t happen without community support and local businesses. [Bakers & Hale](#), a farm-to-table restaurant in Godfrey, donated a percentage of their proceeds last weekend nearing \$2,000.

“Agencies that hit it out of the park was [Riverbend Head Start and Family Services](#), [Riverbend Family Ministries](#) and [Alton Boys and Girls Club](#),” Margaret added. “These agencies realize and appreciate how much this event does for their clients and the community.”

Several other businesses donated raffle prizes, from a seven-night stay at Panama City beach to Cardinal tickets and cash prizes. A few ticket sellers sold over 200 raffle tickets single-handedly.

“The raffle is what makes the money,” Margaret said in a statement after the event. “We are so appreciative to those that have donated their properties and gifts for this event. Ticket sellers went above and beyond this year. Top sellers were Tina Bennet with 237. She won the Cardinal tickets donated by Republic Services. Next was our faithful Margot Huber at 200. Margot won the brahmin purse and wallet donated by Freer. Other top sellers were the fabulous Debbie Witsken at 165 and Jane Saale at 111. They are our stars on top of the tree this year.”

While Christmas in July is a one-day event, the giving spirit continues throughout the year. Margaret noted that the shop will continue accepting donations and connecting people with the United Way Community Christmas program. Margaret, Taylor and Lily encourage people to do what they can to help.

“We were taught at an early age it was better to give than receive,” Taylor and Lily said in a statement. “While we are now older we still realize the importance of community and giving back. We are humbled by everyone’s generosity and support.”

Visit the [local United Way chapter website](#) for more information about how you can help.