

Food banks struggle to keep up with demand

By Natalie Hayes, nhayes@mysuburbanlife.com

GateHouse News Service



Tue Dec 18, 2007, 11:16 AM CST

Kane County, IL -

Christmas Eve will mark the end of the Salvation Army's Kettle Bell Ringing season this year, and with only a few days left, 2007 has already been one of the most successful years yet for the Tri-Cities.

But not all local charities have been as fortunate.

Through red kettle and mail donations, the Tri-City Salvation Army, as of late last week, had raised \$152,000, or 56 percent, toward its goal of \$270,000

for the 2007 Christmas season. Donations typically increase during the last week of holiday shopping.

This year's goal is \$10,000 higher than last year's \$260,000 goal.

Donations for 2006 totaled \$261,000, which was used to help more than 5,000 individuals in St. Charles, Batavia and Geneva.

Donations received on celebrity Bell Ringing Day Nov. 6 totaled \$394, more than any other day so far this year, said Major Steven Kohler of the Tri-City Salvation Army.

Celebrity volunteers included Geneva Mayor Kevin Burns, St. Charles Mayor Donald DeWitte, community leaders and reporters from the Republican.

Celebrity volunteers spent an hour or two of their time to help the charity gather donations outside Wal-Mart in St. Charles.

"This year has been better than last year — we're very grateful for the response we've had," Kohler said. "We're confident with the donations so far."

The organization is also having another successful year with its Toys for Kids (formerly known as Toys for Tots) and Angel Tree Programs.

But the Northern Illinois Food Bank in St. Charles, a nonprofit distribution center that serves an estimated 275,000 people living at or below the poverty level in 13 counties, isn't having the same success as the Salvation Army.

The food bank reports a 735,290 pound decrease in donations this year compared to December 2006. Federal Commodities are down by 31 percent and donated food is down 17 percent from last year.

That means 565,607 meals will not reach hungry people this holiday season, said Samantha Haggerty, spokesperson for the Northern Illinois Food Bank in St. Charles.

Food bank directors attribute the shortage to an increase in the number of people who have relied on food pantries this year. Jobs are paying less and residents are working two or three jobs just to barely get by, said Dennis Smith, chief executive officer of the Northern Illinois Food Bank.

"Some of our food pantries are serving 50 percent more people this year than last," he said.

Smith said the shortage could also be blamed on a stalled Farm Bill.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program, the source of the Federal Commodities, is funded by the Farm Bill, which was reauthorized five years ago with a flat funding allocation of \$140 million, Smith said in a statement.

“Over the past five years, the purchasing power of those dollars has declined as costs of food has risen — this translates into less food in that program that can be distributed to eligible people,” he said.

Comments (0)

Leave a Comment:

Participation in online discussion is subject to our [Terms of Use](#). By commenting, you agree to be bound by these terms.

Add Comment

Powered by: [SEO by eLocalListing](#), [Advertiser profiles](#), [Business directory by Premier Guide](#), [Zope Corp.](#)

WEB BROWSING REDEFINED  FIREFOX 2