

Angel Tree boosts holiday spirits

.



Aryanna Rose may be too young to know who Santa Claus is, but she can spot a stuffed animal faster than you can say, “ho, ho, ho!”

“Dog! Dog!” the 11-month-old cooed, big blue eyes fixed to a bag her mother had filled with small toys, stocking stuffers and a plush puppy

with floppy ears.

“She’s going to like this Christmas a lot,” said Kurstie Purtlebaugh, Aryanna Rose’s mother. “We don’t have much in life, but we get to have a good Christmas.”

This year, about 450 families like the Purtlebaughs took part in the Salvation Army’s annual Angel Tree program, which provides low-income Monroe County children with holiday gifts and clothing.

Volunteers spent Thursday distributing the bicycles, dolls, video game systems and board games community members donated to the United Way agency during the months of November and December.

“It makes us real grateful for what we have,” Purtlebaugh said.

This holiday season, the Salvation Army provided approximately 900 kids with about three toys each. Add stocking stuffers such as books, coloring supplies and candy, and children who might otherwise go without have about 11 pieces of “Christmas joy” to unwrap on Dec. 25, said Salvation Army Lt. Sharyn Tennyson.

“People were so generous this year,” Tennyson said.

That generosity has expanded to the nonprofit’s red kettle campaign. Through loose change, crumpled bills and even a check for \$2,000, bell ringers had collected \$74,114.71 as of Tuesday, said Salvation Army spokesman Peter Iversen.

That total is \$13,000 more than was collected during the campaign by this time last year.

“We’re knocking on wood,” Iversen said. “If nothing else changes, we are on track to meet our goal.”

An anonymous individual donated the \$2,000 check during the first weekend of the month. Bell ringers will be collecting toward their \$100,000 goal at 22 Monroe County locations until noon on Christmas Eve.

“A 2,000 check is a pretty healthy boost,” Iversen said. “It was really special.”

United Way is in the midst of its annual campaign, which has a fundraising goal of \$1.3 million. Find out more at monroeunitedway.org.

Donation impact

\$1/week purchases 5.8 pounds of food to feed hungry people.

\$5/week provides three days of emergency housing in the aftermath of a house fire.

\$17/week prevents homelessness and provides a pathway to self-sufficiency for five families behind on their rent and utilities.

For more information about the Salvation Army or to volunteer as a red kettle bell ringer, visit registertoring.com, or call Peter Iversen at 812-336-4310, ext. 102.

Highlights of the United Way 'Your Donation has Power' campaign

Campaign goal: \$1,300,000

Total dollars raised: \$791,036 (61%).

* The IU Credit Union is creating a stronger community with a generous corporate gift and employee contributions of more than \$39,000.

* UPS is delivering improvements in our community through generous contributions totaling \$21,103.

* Employees at Area 10 Agency on Aging, a United Way member agency, are providing solutions for our neighbors by donating \$2,669.

Impact:

Donations to United Way helped to ensure that 1,682 elderly neighbors were able to stay safely in their homes because affordable housing and home-based nutrition, visitation and repair services were provided by member agency Area 10 Agency on Aging.