

The season for giving...

Police officers help spread holiday cheer through area service project

Community shares generosity with local children during the holiday season with the annual 'Shop With a Cop' program



Photos by Kristen Baiocchi

ABOVE: One young local girl picks out a pair of pink gym shoes during the annual 'Shop With a Cop' program at the Gurnee Wal-mart. **BELOW LEFT:** A local girl shares a smile and a hug with Jamie Roark, a sophomore at Lakes Community High School and member of the Explorers program. This is Roark's first year with the program. **BELOW RIGHT:** An off duty Lindenhurst Police officer takes time from normal work day to tie a local boy's shoe.



By Kristen Baiocchi

Rebecca Albrecht takes down a pair of pink and gray gym shoes off the rack, debating, as her eyes glance down from the shoes to the soon to be occupants, which are now curled up tightly in the long white socks that cover them.

"What about these?" Albrecht asks the blonde haired little girl sitting in front of her.

"Yeah, I really like those," exclaims the little girl, with a sparkle in her eyes, and a smile that stretches from one ear to the other.

"Okay then," says Albrecht. "Let's put them in the cart."

Albrecht, serves the Lindenhurst area as a community service police officer for the Lindenhurst Police Department. For a number of years she has worked at the police office and has been a part of the Shop With a Cop program for two years.

"This is a very rewarding program," said Albrecht. "A lot of these kids don't have an opportunity to have an up close and personal contact with a police officer in a positive way. This [program] gives us the chance to interact with the kids in a positive way and hopefully make a significant difference."

According to Sandy Keller, Patrol officer for the Lindenhurst Police Department and Shop With a Cop coordinator, the program is in its third year at Lindenhurst and is continuing to be a success.

"Every child should have a merry Christmas," said Keller. "Just because their dad died, or their mom got cancer, that's not the child's fault. It's hard for a child to understand that things happen."

The program benefits local children that are in financial need, who are selected from schools in the surrounding area.

"This program is a big deal for me because I don't get a lot of stuff for Christmas because my family can't afford it," said one of the children involved in the program. "I live with my brother, mother, and my auntie. Me being able to participate in this program is making them happy because it's giving me a chance to shop with a police officer and have a really good time."

Sponsoring the program is a array of local businesses.

"Wal-Mart is a huge sponsor," said Keller. "Everyone involved, especially Wal-Mart has been very generous. The press has been very generous also."

Another local pizza shop donated pizza for the children prior to their shopping extravaganza.

Aside from monetary donations, various community member have attributed their time and services to help the cause.

The volunteers include Wal-Mart employees, village trustees, Magic Steve Jordan who provided the entertainment, off duty police officers as well as members of the Lindenhurst Explorers program.

Carl Nolin, Village of Lindenhurst trustee, was one of the local board members that volunteered their time for the cause.

"This time of year we need to care of each other, especially the children," said Nolin. "You can see that this means the world to them, you just can't put their expression into words."

Sarah Gardner, a 17 year old senior from Zion Benton High School was one of the many Wal-mart employees who donated their time to help with the event.

"It's all about helping these kids experience something that they wouldn't necessarily be able to do on their own during the holiday season," said Gardner. "We're giving back to the community, and that's a great feeling to have."

Jamie Roark, 16 year old Lakes Community High School sophomore, was one of the Lindenhurst Explorers who volunteered for the evening.

"I love helping people and really enjoy doing community service," said Roark, who believes that doing community service is essential in life. "It's so important to help out, especially when there's needy kids. We sometimes tend to be really selfish. The holiday times are about giving, not receiving. This has given me a great opportunity to share and show the kids that we [the community] really do care about them and helping out people in need."

Stocking up on stocking stuffers for the holidays

By Jessica Gaido

One of the most anticipated surprises of Christmas morning are all of the little surprises tucked inside of the Christmas stocking.

Though the stocking can only fit small things, it is still one of the favorite parts of Christmas morning, and the concept is enjoyed by the majority of Antioch Community High School students.

"It is always fun seeing what kinds of little things are in there," said ACHS junior, Kandace Kratz. "It is always a surprise, and has all the little presents like jewelry and cd's."

So what are the best ideas for

stocking stuffing this year? It seems as though every year there is always the candy, cd's, and money.

But by keeping the gifts original, creative, and surprising adds a whole new surprise to the Christmas stocking tradition.

"I always get all the candy, cd's, and money in my stocking," said ACHS junior, Jessica Neal.

Money is a gift that is enjoyed by everyone, and usually is the perfect size to be tucked up right inside of the stocking.

However, gift cards are more of a personal gift. Gift cards can be purchased for almost every occasion, and will always be appreciated.

Some good gift cards include: favorite clothing stores, favorite restaurants, sporting goods stores, and movie passes.

For teenagers, one of the most appreciated gift cards are gas cards.

"I spend so much money on gas all the time, so receiving a gas card is useful, and will save me money in the long run," said Kratz.

For those who have favorite sports teams or bands, tickets to a professional game or a concert will definitely be a big and unexpected surprise.

Season passes to nearby mountains for skiing and snow boarding also serve as great gifts.

Aside from all of the bigger gifts, there are always the classic, little things that never fail to please.

The favorite cd's, DVD's, and video games, and the lotions, make ups, perfumes, and colognes are just some of the many surprises that never go unappreciated.

Then, of course, who could forget the stocking stuffing favorite, the Christmas candy.

"The stocking is all about the candy. Just fill it up with it [candy] and it's great," said ACHS Junior, Dan Marko.

As most students agree with Marko, candy does seem to be the one thing that they can not get enough of, whether it is candy canes or



another type of candy.

So on Christmas Eve be sure to hang the stockings by the chimney, and hopefully Christmas morning will bring many of these stocking stuffing favorites.