

The Berkshire Eagle

BerkshireEagle.com

Saturday, November 21, 2015

\$1.25

Berkshire Community Action Council clothing drive launches with broader campaign



BCAC Holiday Elf and Giving Tree program coordinator Stefanie Leonczyk talks about the great support of volunteers for the program during a Friday morning press conference to launch this season's campaign in Pittsfield.

By Jenn Smith

Saturday, November 21, 2015

PITTSFIELD — The multiagency effort led by Berkshire Community Action Council to outfit local children with warm clothing for the winter months launched on Friday with several new layers added to its campaign.

Coordinators held a press conference on Friday morning at the agency's headquarters, 1531 East St., prior to the 11 a.m. opening of the Giving Tree, located in the center court near the entrance to JCPenney store at The Berkshire Mall in Lanesborough.

Also known as the Holiday Elf Warm Clothing Drive, the program is now in its 35th year of campaigning for the community to help donate and purchase winter jackets, hats, mittens and the like for children and teenagers living in central Berkshire County.

Also launched this week was the community coat and clothing drive for northern Berkshire residents, spearheaded by BCAC's North Adams office, located at 85 Main St.

According to BCAC Deputy Director Bryan House, nearly 1,000 youths are enrolled to receive new winter clothes through these two programs, as long as the community can rally to provide them.

This year, to ensure the agency and its partners can meet this goal, multiple outreach and sponsorship efforts have been initiated to engage volunteers with everything from distributing wish lists, to shopping, to packing and delivering packages in time for the Christmas holiday.

One big boost comes from the 35th anniversary season sponsor, Berkshire Money Management, which has committed to the purchase of clothing for 100 children on the Giving Tree list.

Berkshire Money Management CEO and CIO Allen Harris said the charitable program, "makes a real difference in the lives of girls

and boys throughout our community. As we enter into the holiday season, it's wonderful to know that the Giving Tree will put a smile on a child's face, and that is the power of community in action."

Volunteers will also staff and promote pop-up events in Pittsfield and Lanesborough to attract sponsorships and collect gifts.

In addition to the usual Black Friday push, with live radio broadcasting from Live 95.9 FM, program supporter Joe Durwin said, "We're doing a lot of engagement in downtown Pittsfield this year."

On Nov. 28, also known as "Small Business Saturday," BCAC and Berkshire Money Management will host a "Combat the Cold" campaign from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. to raise awareness of the cause behind the Giving Tree — that some kids could go cold this winter for lack of family resources to provide adequate clothing and heating. Volunteers will go without coats and gather in Palace Park and fan out around the city to "stand out in the cold to take a stand against the cold and its impact" on underprivileged youth. Merchandise discount vouchers will be offered on this day to those who decide to sponsor a Giving Tree child.

Additionally, now through the clothing drive closing date of Dec. 12, state Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier has opened her 33 Dunham Mall office as a satellite location for sponsors wishing to pick up a child's wish list envelope or drop off gifts. Farley-Bouvier will also host a donor holiday reception at her office from 5 to 7 p.m. Dec. 4, during the First Fridays Artswalk.

Additional satellite locations will be offered this year in partnership with local holiday festivals, including the Handmade Holiday Festival, which will take place from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 5 and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 6 at Berkshire Community College at 1350 West St., and at the Holiday Shindy, which will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 12 and 13 at Shire City Sanctuary at 40 Melville St.

Alternatively, sponsors can also lend their support online, thanks to two programs coordinated by BCAC Giving Tree coordinator Stefanie Leonczyk. Monetary donations can be made through the fundraising website indiegogo.com, or make specific clothing donation purchases through an online registry through Target.

Volunteers also can sign up online to help via the BCAC Giving Tree Facebook page or VolunteerSpot.com.

New billboard signs have also been raised to raise awareness of not only the Giving Tree campaign, but how area residents also can access other types of services like fuel assistance and educational and career training opportunities.

"There is a lot of need in Berkshire County, and a lot of poverty," said BCAC Executive Director Deb Leonczyk.

"But I'm always excited and touched by the generosity within this community. No matter what request we get, we're always able to meet their needs," she said.

Where to call ...

For information about the BCAC Giving Tree and other assistance programs, call 413-418-3670.