

## More toys needed to meet needs of community this holiday season

On Saturday, December 4, Auxiliary members of the Nottawasaga Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) were outside three locations in Alliston for the 11th annual 'Stuff-A-Cruiser' toy drive standing shoulder to shoulder with Alliston Lions Club members to collect new unwrapped toys for their annual Christmas Hamper program.

Cruisers were parked in front of Walmart, Giant Tiger and Canadian Tire, and members of the public brought toys of all kinds during the 6-hour event with some people bringing non-perishable food items and cash donations instead.

A week ago, the Lions held their 'Fill-A-Bus' fundraiser to collect the food and gift cards needed for the Christmas Hamper program. Although food donations were plentiful, more toys are still required to meet the needs of local families struggling this holiday season.

'Our community is always incredibly generous with their donations. We continue to get food and toy donations from our Red Barrels of Happiness through the middle of December,' said Alliston Lion Jaime Karsch. 'It looks like we will need quite a few more toys. A huge thank you and Lions Roar to everyone who's supported us this holiday season, together we are helping to ensure everyone has a great Christmas.'

Fill-A-Cruiser began in 2012 under Alliston Lions Chair Mike Jerry. He continues to oversee the event each year.

'This past weekend was quieter than usual, but given the economic times and the overall cost of living, and rising property taxes, it is understandable,' said Jerry. 'Monetary donations to shore up what is required are considerably appreciated.'

Although there was less traffic, Karsch adds that Saturday's Fill-A-Cruiser event was still a success, and at the conclusion of the day, all three cruisers and an OPP van were filled.

'It's a great start to our Christmas Hamper Program, as we expect to assist approximately 250 plus this holiday season,' said Karsch. 'Fill a Cruiser is a wonderful event that allows us to collect a large number of toys in one day, it's a great start to toy collection and allows us to start packing the toy hampers while additional donations come in. Being at Canadian Tire, Giant Tiger & Walmart all in the same day helps increase the awareness of our Christmas Hamper Program as well.'

As for the balance needed, Karsch says, 'We are still collecting food, toys for kids up to 12 years of age, gift cards or cash. Toys for kids 10-12 are most in need. Donations can be dropped off at any participating Red Barrel location in Alliston, or at the Alliston Lions Club by appointment. Additionally, we've been posting the 12 Days of Giving on our social media with a list of the food items we're most in need of.'

The hampers will be packed this week, after the final sign-up for assistance has concluded this Wednesday, December 8.

'We won't know how many families we'll have this year until then,' said Karsch. 'Last year we helped approximately 152 families and 250 children, I expect these numbers will be similar, if not a little higher this year.'

Nottawasaga OPP Media Relations Officer, Constable Cindy Jacome, says there's a lot more coming up this season for local police as well.

'This coming Saturday, December 11, starting at 8 a.m. we have our 'Shop with a Cop' event at Canadian Tire Alliston,' Const. Jacome told The Times. 'One, sometimes two students have been picked from each of the nineteen elementary schools in our area to shop with an officer. We partner with Murphy's Farm to raise funds and each student gets \$100 to shop for their families for Christmas but they must also buy something for themselves.'

Also, the Festive RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) program continues in partnership with the South Simcoe Police.

As for their role in the Fill-A-Cruiser event, Constable Jacome says the OPP's Auxiliary officers make the difference.

Auxiliary members have important roles when it comes to community events. They will plan a good portion of them which has them reaching out to community partners for planning. The Auxiliary members can be seen at most community events, they assist with traffic and road closures at some spots. Other times they are at the front in the spotlight representing the OPP, said Const. Jacome.

If you missed Fill-A-Cruiser and would like an appointment to donate a new unwrapped toy, non-perishable food item from the list of required items, or a gift card, call the Alliston Lions Club at 705-435-4012, or send a Messenger message. To see the 12 Days of Giving posts on Facebook search @AllistonLionsClub.

**By Wendy Gabrek**