

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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Volunteer Center Seeks Donors to Fill Gift Requests; Need is Dire

North Jersey: As predicted, the economic downturn on Wall Street and real estate has begun to show signs of hitting very close to home. Demand for myriad social services increases as more people lose jobs, homes and sources of income.

The holidays may be dismal for over 3,000 needy children and parents, lonely seniors and disabled adults in Bergen and Passaic Counties this year.

Donations of toys, clothing, gift certificates and cash are urgently needed to help bring holiday cheer to people with no families at all, or those who might otherwise be forgotten.

Through the Volunteer Center of Bergen County's **All Wrapped Up Holiday Giving Program**, low income families and single parent households, as well as elderly, homeless and physically or mentally disabled adults and teens are matched with people from the community who are willing to donate needed items like clothing, toys and gift cards at food stores.

Local non-profit agencies have submitted gift "wish lists" to the Volunteer Center, which in turn matches generous donors with these less fortunate families and individuals, thus "adopting" them for the holidays. At the present time the Volunteer Center has received many more requests for assistance than there are donors willing to help.

Individual donors, or members of community or employee groups may help a family through the **Adopt-a-Family** program. "We have received gift requests for 940

families, ranging in size from two to seven people, but almost 564 families (approximately 2,256 individual family members) are still waiting to be ‘adopted’,” says Janet Sharma, executive director of the Volunteer Center.

“Through the **Heart-to-Heart** program, the agencies have also sent us gift requests for 831 individuals-- elderly, homeless and disabled persons, children and teens--and less than half of these people have been matched. Imagine a child with no present to open during this time of year, or a lonely person not being remembered by anyone.” says Ms. Sharma

All requests for assistance are submitted to the Volunteer Center by non-profit organizations that have screened and prioritized the requests based on need. Donors will have no direct contact with individuals or families; all gifts will be delivered to and distributed by the non-profit organization.

Companies, religious and service groups, families and individual donors who wish to help should call (201) 489-9454, Ext. 118, or visit the Volunteer Center’s website at www.bergenvolunteers.org and click on Holiday Programs to download a registration form. All registrations must be submitted to the Volunteer Center by December 5..

“Last year, charitable giving reached an all-time high of \$306 billion. With the significant loss of wealth in the stock market, this year, donors may want to withhold contributions because of the uncertainty of the marketplace. Our message to our neighbors is to ‘give something’”, continues Ms Sharma. “Even if a monetary contribution is less than last year, we encourage people to come forward to send cash or gift cards, in any amount to ensure that those hit hard by the economy aren’t left out this holiday season.”

Gift cards from Shop Rite, Pathmark and Stop and Shop, and from Target, K-Mart and Sears are especially needed, as are donations of cash. Send to the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, 64 Passaic St, Hackensack, NJ 07601, by December 5th.

The Volunteer Center of Bergen County strengthens the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating model volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs.

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