



Jim Raine of the Ravens' Nest 14 club in Sykesville delivered more than 240 toys and gift cards on Friday to the Neighbors in Need Holiday Gift Shop in Westminster. The items benefit needy families in Carroll County. Businesses in the Sykesville and Eldersburg area donated space for collection boxes to make the drive possible. ((Photo by Jim Joyner))

Lining a Nest with holiday joy

Fan club, businesses aid Neighbors in Need

By Jim Joyner

jjoyner@patuxent.com

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Jim Raine of Ravens' Nest 14 in Sykesville and Eldersburg said he was a little reluctant this year to approach some of the businesses that annually help him collect toys and gifts for Carroll County's neediest families.

Times are tough, and Raine was concerned that some of the business owners might not want to host a collection box in their lobby or store.

Then they started asking him.

"They were like, 'Where's my box? When are you bringing my box?' " Raine said. "They really wanted to do it."

Last Friday, Raine drove from Eldersburg to Westminster with an SUV packed with presents reflecting the generosity of those businesses and local residents -- about 240 toy and gift cards donated to the Neighbors in Need Holiday Gift Shop, run by the Human Services Programs of Carroll County.

"We welcome donations one at a time," said Holly Hutchins, deputy director of HSPCC, "but 250 at a time really helps us."

In the past weeks, Neighbors in Need has been collecting toys, household items, gifts for teens, clothing and other items for an estimated 900 families that register to take part in the Holiday Gift Shop.

The shop, located in a donated storefront at the Cranberry Square Shopping Center, was open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week for families to "shop" for items.

Ravens Nest 14, which meets at E.W. Beck's in Sykesville, has aided the drive for the past eight years. Raine, who is a board member with the Nest, has been doing it even longer -- he's helped organize drives for Neighbors in Need for the past 11 years.

"I dig this," said Raine, who himself is a father of three. "I get a kick out of doing this."

This year, as they do annually, Ravens Nest members launched the drive with a holiday party where members each brought a gift to donate.

"I think about half of what we collected came right there," said Raine.

But the biggest boost -- and Raine's greatest source of pride -- comes from the way local businesses pitch in to help the cause by hosting collection boxes, talking it up with customers and digging deep themselves. This year, eight local businesses hosted boxes:

Fringes Family Hair Care;
E.W. Beck's;
Meiklejohn's Pub;
Crossroads Bowling Center;
Tim's Auto Repair;
Dr. Palamone, Chiropractor;
Grayson Homes (Ellicott City); and
Serra Brothers

"It's a human interest story, but it's not even remotely about me," said Raine. "It's about the people on this list, and all of their customers, who make it happen."

Making it happen in 2008 was critical to Hutchins and the Neighbors in Need Drive. On Friday, when Raine came by to drop off his items, Hutchins was lamenting that donations were down from previous years. The Nest's donation came in the nick of time -- and helped bridge the gap.

Raine said the Nest's drive was a bit down as well -- last year the group collected more than 500 toys -- but he's hopeful even more businesses will step forward in 2009.

"If we could have 30 drop-off points, it would be awesome," he said.

For more information on the Neighbors in Need program, call 410-857-2999, or visit the Web site at www.hspinc.org.

Ravens Nest 14

Ravens Nest 14 is a Baltimore Ravens fan club that also gets involved in community outreach and charity. The group raises money throughout the year through bull roasts, dances, raffles and more. The Nest meets the first Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. at E.W. Beck's, 7565 Main St., Sykesville. New members are welcome. For details, go to www.ravensnest14.org.