

**COMMUNITY ACTION**

How to help the Cayuga County Christmas Elf make Christmas merry for local children



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As we usher in another holiday season, we are fortunate to live in a community that is ever mindful of those among us in need. One in four children younger than 18 in the city of Auburn, and one in five countywide, lives below the poverty line. The Cayuga County Christmas Elf, now in its 26th year, serves children and families in need during the holiday season. The Elf provides each child with a large toy, a small toy, a stuffed animal, a reading book and a coloring book and crayons. Since several of these children receive breakfast and lunch at school, the Elf provides each family a \$25 Wegmans gift certificate to help with their increased food bill during the holiday break. Last year the Elf helped more than 700 families and upward of 2,000 children.

Christmas Elf is a volunteer-driven campaign that relies on the generous support of its sponsors, including Auburn Party Rental, Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, Currier Plastics, Currier Racing, Downtown Books & Coffee, Finger Lakes Business Services and The Citizen, as well as Elf committee volunteers and hundreds of donors. Christmas Elf donations from local businesses, churches, individuals and other organizations make the difference for many who struggle with providing meals and gifts for their children during the holidays. There are many ways to support the Elf, including donating toys, making monetary contributions, volunteering and/or participating in local fundraisers to benefit the Elf. Nearly 100 percent of Elf donations directly support children in need. No funds are utilized for staff, and less than .5 percent of funds are used for postage and mailings.

New this year is an exciting fundraiser organized by the Christmas Elf committee: Holiday Shopping Fore! A Cause will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 16 at the Owasco Country Club. This event is free and open to the public. Holiday shoppers can purchase gifts from upwards of 20 local vendors selling a range of products, including golf equipment, wine, handbags, toys, artwork, jewelry and baked goods. Santa Claus will be onsite from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to visit with children, and Julie Howard will sing Christmas carols from 2 to 4 p.m. Lunch will be available for purchase, along with

tickets to win a variety of donated raffle items. Additionally, the Auburn Holiday Inn will host a Breakfast with Santa from 9 to 11 a.m. Dec. 8, and IGNITE: Cayuga County's Young Professionals will host an annual Holiday Party at the Aurora Inn from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 17. All of these events will benefit the Christmas Elf.

Multiple toy drop-off sites have been arranged and will be active by mid-November, including Auburn Memorial City Hall, BJ's Wholesale Club, CSCAA Site I at 65 State St. and Site II at 1 Brookfield Place, Downtown Books & Coffee, Elements Salon, the Holiday Inn, Walgreens (Genesee Street and Grant Avenue locations) and Wegmans. Donations of toys at the Holiday Inn will entitle the donor to receive 10 percent off at McMurphy's Irish Pub!

A variety of donations are welcome, including toys, books, games, clothing, warm weather clothing, toiletries and just about anything else that might be on a child's wish list; items for teenagers are especially needed. Monetary donations are welcome and can be mailed or dropped off to CSCAA Site I, located at 65 State St. in Auburn. New this year: Online donations can be made to the Elf through our secure website, cscaa.com/christmaself.html; all major credit cards and bank cards are accepted. Toy drop-off sites and fundraising events are posted online, as well.

Applications for the Christmas Elf are currently being accepted for families with children in need this holiday season. Referrals can be made through the child's school, the Cayuga County Department of Health and Human Services, or another human service agency within the county through Dec. 13. Applications are screened and eligible families with children 18 and younger are contacted via mail, letting them know when the Elf order will be ready for pickup; the distribution day this year is Dec. 18. Late applications will be accepted for emergencies on a case-by-case basis.

CSCAA is seeking Elf volunteers to help screen applications, return phone calls and pack last-minute boxes. Interested parties should contact our Site I office at (315) 255-1703. For more information on the Christmas Elf program, including donating/eligibility, please call me at (315) 252-0038 ext. 202.