

Mokena nonprofit looks to distribute hundreds of supply bags for Valentine's Day

Deadline Feb. 5 for holiday donations

DANNY CIAMPRONE, Editor

What seems like an endless array of supplies ready to be sorted and shipped lines the tables of the warehouse inside My Joyful Heart.

Along the outside walls are a number of crates, each labeled with the name of a school and over pouring with supply bags designated to area children in need.

Valentine's Day is quickly approaching for My Joyful Heart, as Diane Carroll, executive director and founder, has been working tirelessly the past two weeks with volunteers and staff members in anticipation for shipping out approximately 800 bags to children in the Chicago area.

Each bag contains everything from pillows and throw blankets, to school supplies, hygiene products, books and small toys.

"And here's the star of the show," Carroll said Thursday, Jan. 28, referring to a stuffed robot that will go into the bags for My Joyful Heart's sponsored children.

The Lockport resident celebrated the 14th anniversary of My Joyful Heart just last month, which provides a variety of items to children in need from schools and churches in the area according to a wish list that the nonprofit receives. Items on the list range from toys and clothing to hygiene products.

For this year's Valentine's Day donation, Carroll said Orland Park Recreation donated molded crayons for the children, and PCS Industries in Tinley Park donated toilet paper because many children indi-

TO DONATE TO MY JOYFUL HEART'S VALENTINE'S DAY SUPPLY DRIVE

- Supplies and donations can be dropped off at My Joyful Heart, 9981 190th St., in Mokena, or by visiting www.myjoyfulheart.org.

cated a need for it on their wish lists under "immediate needs."

"[PCS Industries] donated enough for all the kids to get some toilet paper for Valentine's Day," Carroll said. "It's a need these kids have."

Also included in each bag is a pillow that Carroll said is "absolutely wonderful," and each child will receive 12 items total varying by age and gender.

"Some of it varies, like we have necklaces for girls that are in seventh-grade, and little craft kits for the younger kids," she said, adding that the items will go to schools throughout the Chicago area.

Carroll said the bags have to be ready to go by Friday, Feb. 5, to give to various schools so that officials have time to pick everything up, and for children to have time to fill out their Valentine's Day cards.

My Joyful Heart is just coming off its Christmas donation, which is one of its largest donation times of the year.

"That was a huge event for us, so Valentine's Day is always on the smaller side, but we give [children] something so that they know that they're being thought of, prayed for, cared about and they get a new pillow," she said.

Carroll said her and her staff prepare special bags for each holiday, but after



Diane Carroll (left), executive director and founder of My Joyful Heart, helps to sort items for this year's Valentine's Day donation Thursday, Jan. 28, along with volunteer Jean Toberman at the nonprofit in Mokena.

PHOTOS BY DANNY CIAMPRONE/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

Valentine's Day, the next major donation event will be in the summer.

"We give them things they can play with outside, either playground balls or NERF balls," she said. "Last year, we had stomp rockets for the kids and they had sandals and shorts and tank tops."

Carroll also said that many of the children will be receiving donated bikes this summer, along with the usual bag of hygiene items, toys and crafts.

Since coming to their new warehouse in Mokena last June, Carroll said it has been "fabulous," especially with the support she has received from the village and residents.

"We just love it," she said of the move. "I want to get more involved here in Mo-

kena. I want to get to know the businesses more and really reach into the Mokena schools because I know there has to be families that are struggling.

"It can happen to anybody."

Part of that involvement also has been the recent addition of a junior board made up of six teenagers from the Lincoln-Way area who want to be more involved with the mission of My Joyful Heart.

"We're primarily looking for high school kids to help with that, so the board itself has been formed, but they're looking for other kids in that age group who may like to help with the fundraising," said Lisa Blair, business development manager at My Joyful Heart.

The board had its first



My Joyful Heart volunteer Barb Plantz gathers items for bags set to be donated Friday, Feb. 5, to children in need.

meeting Jan. 18, and will now look to take on future endeavors to assist My Joyful Heart.

"The young ladies were extremely excited about the potential for them to get involved further with My Joy-

ful Heart because most of them have been volunteers here, so they're really excited and so are we to have this wonderful group of teens helping to spread the word about what we do," Carroll said.