

Local bus driver leads the way for Stuff the Bus donation event

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Chippewa Valley Schools bus driver Jan Reed, center, stands with Director of Transportation Brendan Wagner, left, and Human Resources Supervisor Dawn Leone, right, with the sign for the Stuff the Bus event.

Photo courtesy of Chippewa Valley Schools

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP — As the weather turned from bad to worse last winter, Jan Reed watched as students got on her Chippewa Valley Schools bus wearing coats that were too small or too big.

So she approached a social worker at one of the district's schools about doing something to help these kids who were in need because their families couldn't afford the necessities. Working with fellow bus drivers, they helped gather about \$400 worth of toiletries, food and clothing, plus gift cards, for a few students.

Reed said she heard the story of a woman who adopted her daughter's children and couldn't afford to give them Christmas gifts. The donations allowed her to not only give gifts, but also to put food on the table, and Reed said she couldn't help but tear up.

This year, Reed wanted to go bigger and help more students in the district across Clinton Township and Macomb Township. On Nov. 11 and 12, Reed will be joined by several other district employees for a Stuff the Bus event in the Walmart parking lot, 18400 Hall Road in Clinton Township.

The district is looking for donations of new clothes, coats, boots, mittens, toys, toiletries and nonperishable food. Gently used clothes can be donated, as well as gift cards.

The event will be held 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day.

"I drive kids of different ages, and I look at some of these kids and it hits me," Reed said. "I see them wearing these old coats that don't fit, and I started thinking about helping them. And this year, I started thinking why can't we go bigger and help more kids."

Reed said she went to her boss, Transportation Director Brendan Wagner, about using a bus to hold all the donations during the two days.

Wagner said that while last year, it was just Reed and her fellow bus drivers collecting donations for one elementary school, this year, more people and more schools are involved as part a districtwide event. Teachers, administrators, clerical staff and the bus drivers will all help during the event.

"I am very proud of Jan, who was the impetus and has really gone above and beyond," Wagner said. "My sense, based on the response we got from the school district employees, which shocked me beyond my wildest imagination, is we are going to be blessed with a lot of donations from folks."

Reed said the volunteers will collect the donations and put them on the bus each day, as well as hand out fliers to people to explain what they are doing. Reed was able to get a storage unit donated for the cause, which is set up at the bus garage where the donations will go at the end of the event.

The staff will then sort through the donations, and the schools will be notified of what was collected. The St. Peter Food Pantry in Macomb Township will also be notified. When teachers or administrators identify a student in need, the donations will be packed up and given to the school to give to the families.

Reed said the goal is to stuff the bus full each day, and she is hoping that word of mouth will help get more people dropping donations off.

"There are a lot of kids who live in this district who are low-income," she said. "This is not about one individual, but about coming together and helping each other out and helping give to the less fortunate. We can all work together to make this happen."