



Fox Valley United Way staff and volunteers load a truck of gifts from its Holiday Assistance Program in 2022. Sponsorship is down this season, which is creating concern with a deadline looming next Tuesday and dozens of children still in need of toys or clothing for Christmas. **FOX VALLEY UNITED WAY**

Still looking for sponsors

Fox Valley United Way holiday gift drive falling behind past years' support



Denise Crosby

Fox Valley United Way CEO Deborah Rudel is without question one of the most optimistic people I've had the privilege of working with over the years.

But when we spoke last week there was an unexpected tone of concern in her voice.

"This is so strange," she started off saying. "In the past 15 years we have never had to appeal for people to come out and sponsor families" for the United Way's annual Holiday Assistance Program..

"We have always had an abundance of sponsors," she continued. "And by Thanksgiving we typically have almost all the children — 500 or so — taken care of."

But this year, for whatever reason, is different.

"We are struggling," she said,

"to find enough sponsors" for the families on their list.

Like I said, Rudel is always so upbeat, so positive, especially when talking about the generosity of the people and the businesses in our communities over the years.

But the numbers are not so encouraging right now.

And that can't help but make her worry there could be kids who won't have anything under the tree come Christmas morning.

These 498 children and 182

families — 75% are from Aurora — have all been thoroughly vetted, recommended by United Way's partner agencies or through school districts, churches, community groups or local shelters.

"These are kids from families who are truly at the poverty level and struggling to make ends meet," she said.

Although "we are only concentrating on kids this year," the program is accepting dona-

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City of Aurora honors legacy of the Rev. Davi

By Steve Lord
The Beacon-News

The city of Aurora this week honored the Rev. David Engbarth, the priest who spent a lifetime

Engbarth Day.

Irvin remembered during his own time as a young community-based prosecutor in Aurora Engbarth's work with the Coalition for Prayer and Reconciliation.

be judged on one thing: How much did we love," he said.

The Rev. Jerome Leake, who served at St. Joseph, Our Lady of Good Counsel and Aurora Central Catholic High School, led people in a prayer for Engbarth.





The headquarters of Fox Valley United Way's Holiday Assistance Program in downtown Aurora is not as full as 2022, which has prompted a desperate plea for sponsors to donate before the program's Dec. 12 deadline. **FOX VALLEY UNITED WAY**

Crosby

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tions for gift cards to big box stores for needed household items such as pots and pans, bedding and towels.

Time is running short, however, and there are at least 150 kids who need a hero to step forward.

So what's to blame, you might ask. The economy is certainly a factor. Inflation means all of us are paying more for less.

But the hardest hit are the poor, including those with children.

Rudel also understands there are many wonderful programs out there, all vying for the same donors.

But this is Christmas we are talking about.

Could it be, I asked her, that sponsors are down because so many are working from home and don't have those office opportunities to get into the rah-rah team-building spirit of the season?

It's certainly a possibility, she said, noting that corporations normally taking 20 families are now just asking for 10.

Whatever the reason, Rudel knows for a fact that the Holiday Assistance Program headquarters on Broadway in Aurora is not as full this year.

And she is "getting nervous."

"These are families with real needs," she reiterated,

her emotions more apparent as she recalls a mother who had only the use of one hand when she came in to sign her children up for gifts. And when Rudel asked if she herself had specific items on her holiday wish list, the mom mentioned a "cutting board designed for a one-handed person so she would be able to make peanut butter sandwiches for her children."

The request hit this CEO, herself a mother and grandmother, hard. After all, most of us take for granted the ability to perform such a basic act of maternal love.

I know Rudel will find a way to get that cutting board.

But she needs the rest of us to help get gifts under the tree for this mother's children - and dozens upon dozens more.

If you or a group would like to sponsor a child for \$75, please act quickly, as the deadline is Tuesday, Dec. 12.

To help out, call the United Way office at 630-896-4636 and ask for Director of Development J. D. Ostergaard, who can provide details on what is needed, including clothing sizes and toys.

You do the shopping. United Way will distribute.

And all will feel the joy of a child on Christmas morning.

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