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Holiday for Head Start

Mail carrier leads charitable effort

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For The Telegraph

The holiday season will be brighter for dozens of Riverbend Head Start & Family Service families thanks to two men who are determined to put smiles on children's faces.

John Ciszczon, of New Douglas, delivers mail to the Edwardsville Head Start Center at 710 N. Main St. For the past six years, he has taken up a collection at work and from people on his route to sponsor Head Start families during the holiday season.

"To me Christmas is a magical season; even at my age it still is," said Ciszczon. "The thought of a child not experiencing Christmas is a terrible thought. That's what really prompted me to start doing something."

Madison County families qualify for Head Start

because they have a child between the ages of birth and 5 and live below the federal poverty line, which is \$23,550 for a family of four. Many of the families do not have money to buy a Christmas meal or presents for their children.

Ciszczon is a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 155, so he attended a Greater Madison County Federation of Laborers meeting earlier this year and heard about its charitable efforts. The discussion inspired him to talk to Executive Board Member Rick Stamer about his passion for helping Head Start families. It was the piece of the puzzle he needed to take his vision to the next level.

"He told me he's raised in the last six years like \$300 to \$700 each year," Stamer said. "I said John; we can do better than that. I'm in."

Stamer has a history of philanthropic work in the community. For three years he organized the Battle of the Badges charitable bas-



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Rick Stamer (left) and John Ciszczon (right) organized the Holiday for Head Start campaign. They are asking for \$100 donations so families enrolled in Riverbend Head Start & Family Services' programs can have a holiday meal.

ketball game so the Glen-Ed Food Pantry could pay off its mortgage and get a new roof. He also helped fund-raise for the Ryan Garbs Gold Star Memorial in downtown Edwardsville.

The two men brainstormed with Edwardsville Head Start Center Supervisor Faith Graser and came up with Holiday for Head Start. They have rented out the Wildey Theatre on Dec. 7 and invited all Edwardsville and Collinsville Head Start families to watch a free screen-

ing of "Polar Express." They also mailed out hundreds of letters to businesses and organizations asking them for a \$100 donation to purchase gift cards to union grocery stores so Head Start families can purchase a holiday meal.

"This way they get money for food and can budget for Christmas gifts," Stamer said.

So far, the two have raised more than \$8,000 thanks to donations from Gori Julian & Associates, P.C. Attorneys at Law; the

Law Office of Keith Short, P.C.; Mark Goldenburg and more. They know they need more donations to help more families. There are more than 800 children enrolled in the Head Start program. It is a voluntary program, so parents choose to enroll because they want their children to be prepared for kindergarten and know they need extra support.

"Kids are our future. If we don't present them with opportunities, then we have no future," Ciszczon said.

"When you look at the situation of who qualifies for Head Start, this means something. This is a way that we can help these 867 children. Let's help as many as we can."

If you would like to make a donation, mail it to Riverbend Head Start and Family Services at 550 Landmarks Blvd., P.O. Box 250, Alton, IL 62002. Checks should be made out to Riverbend Head Start & Family Services and include "Holiday for Head Start" in the memo line.