

## ***Giving Back helps homeless***



Wendi Winters - For The Capital

Steve Anstett, interim director of Giving Back Inc., shows the items that will be packed inside 1,200 nylon backpacks and distributed to the homeless this Christmas eve.

## **Volunteers to distribute donations before Christmas**

By WENDI WINTERS For The Capital

Published December 13, 2007

During the five days before Christmas, the Farmers Market off Riva Road won't be showcasing the fruits of county fields.

Rather, under the open-air pavilion volunteers will harvest fruits of kindness donated by area residents, schools, Scouting groups, houses of worship and clubs.

This is the 25th year of Giving Back, a Holiday Help the Homeless Drive.

The charitable event, founded by Annapolis resident Linda Greenberg, has grown steadily over the years to include hundreds of young volunteers, a fleet of rental trucks, and thousands of donations from local folks.

From Dec. 20- 23, volunteers will gather at the Farmers Market from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. to help sort, size and box donations as they arrive and they will load the long row of waiting trucks.

Giving Back seeks donations of clean, new and nearly new blankets, hats, gloves, coats, sweaters, sleeping bags, hoodies, blue jeans, backpacks, toiletries, baby items, strollers, infant seats and baby clothing. Brand new, unused thermal socks and thermal underwear are also needed, as well as unwrapped toys and gifts.

All donations can be brought to the Farmers Market from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 20-23.

The group is also hoping for donations of bagged lunches (no mayonnaise please), bottled water and drinks, bagged desserts and candy to provide Christmas Day meals. For details, visit the Web site [www.HomelessDrive.com](http://www.HomelessDrive.com); or e-mail [homelessdrive@usa.com](mailto:homelessdrive@usa.com), or call 410-295-0089.

The group also needs cash - lots of it.

Since last year, its focus has been on the backpack program - stuffing a nylon pack with essential winter clothing for a homeless person.

The interim director, Steve Anstett, vice president of marketing for American Wood Moulding in Hanover, used his credit cards to purchase, in bulk, 1,200 backpacks and some of the items that will go inside. And in a closeout deal, he bought more than 800 winter coats and 500 pairs of insulated boots. The bills come due in January.

"This is a faith-based organization," Mr. Anstett said. "I buy on faith that donations will come in to cover what was purchased." Donations can be dropped off at the Farmers Market or checks can be mailed to: Giving Back Inc., 626 C Admiral Drive, Annapolis, MD 21401.

The group has no major corporate sponsors. Most of the donations it receives come in increments of \$25 and \$50. Luckily, most years, cash donations cover nearly all the costs of backpacks, clothing, food, trucks, fuel and other expenses. "97.5 percent goes to the project," he said. "2.5 percent goes to legal and administrative costs. No one is on salary: everyone involved is a volunteer."

On Christmas Eve, Monday, Dec. 24, two shifts of volunteers will be needed to ride the truck caravans to homeless shelters and street corners in this county, and in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, to deliver the items directly into hands of homeless children, women and men.

Some of the homeless have often waited for hours in the cold for the trucks to arrive on Christmas Eve. The trucks bring the only presents they will receive.

"On the evening shift, Chevy's Restaurant is following the trucks with a food truck, to give everyone a hot, meal, too," Mr. Anstett noted. "Girl Scout troops and churches make bag lunches for the next day, so these people's hands are full!" he smiled. "School of the Incarnation, Annapolis Area Christian High School and Key School have been outstanding in filling many of the backpacks for us each year."

"We visit the shelters on the day shift. On the evening shift, we go to two spots in Baltimore every Christmas Eve. Hundreds of men, women and kids are waiting for us."

Statistics from the National Alliance To End Homelessness note during an average year, 2.5 million to 3.5 million people live on the streets or in shelters nationwide. 600,000 families and 1.35 million children experience homelessness each year. Twenty-three percent to 40 percent are military veterans.

*Leslie Hunt contributed to this story*