

Fire department's toy and food drive breaks fundraising record on opening day

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The annual toy and food drive hosted by the Shelburne and District Fire Department (SDFD) kicked off this past weekend on Nov. 22, marking the drive's biggest opening weekend since it began 16 years ago.

The first collection was held at the Shelburne Foodland and of the 100 bags prepared as donations, only six were left just a few hours after the fundraiser started.

Running from Nov. 20 to Dec. 20, the drive is currently seeking non-perishable foods- such as canned and packaged goods - along with packaged toys and monetary donations, including gift cards and cash.

Capt. Mike Morrell of the SDFD explained that the goal of the drive aligns with the role of a firefighter: giving back to the community.

"We're on our 16th year now, and it all started with bantering between a bunch of us for a couple of years, until my wife basically said put up or shut up," Morrell said. "So I started looking into where I could get stuff for our community."

He added that what began as a toy drive quickly expanded. "We were originally just going to be a toy drive, but within a week of planning, we changed to a toy and food drive. That's how it all started."

Over the years, demand for the drive has only increased, Morrell said. He stays in regular contact with local organizations to gauge community needs.

"Every year, the need has gotten more and more demanding. I try to have conversations with our community partners, Dufferin Family and Child Services, and the Shepherd's Cupboard (Shelburne) Food Bank to see what they need," he said.

"You really get a picture of what they need, and how it's increasing year after year. It's part population growth, and of course, our economic state is also adding to that."

Morrell expressed gratitude for the department's local partners, including Foodland, Giant Tiger, and No Frills, whose ongoing support has been crucial.

"All three of them, they're incredibly generous to us," Morrell said.

"The Foodland actually prepares bags for us, which makes it way easier, and so does Giant Tiger; they do something similar as well. No Frills and Foodland also give us gift cards, which are also always welcome."

While physical donations are vital, Morrell encourages monetary contributions, which give local food banks flexibility to purchase specific items as needed. Yet, for him, toys remain the heart of the drive.

"One thing that sticks with me is the toys. I think every kid needs to open a toy or a gift during the holidays," Morrell said.

The drive has three more collection days scheduled following the first Foodland collection: Giant Tiger on Nov. 29 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., No Frills on Dec. 13 at the same hours, and Foodland again on Dec. 20 during the same hours.

Those unable to attend these dates can also deliver donations directly to the Shelburne firehouse at 114 O'Flynn Street.