

Businesses Give Back for Toys for Tots

by Mark Berger

Getting into the fall months means foliage, football, and seasons changing. People will be out supporting their favorite teams, events, and colleagues, in their endeavors. This makes for some interesting partnerships moving forward to accomplish a goal.

This part of the season can also be one of reflection. The upcoming months are filled with charitable programs, as well as appeals to help those who are in need. That becomes particularly important during the holiday season, when those who are less fortunate become more in focus.

One such event happens in Cumberland in November—and there is a twist to the normal gift-giving season.

The third-annual Businesses Give Back for Toys for Tots happens on Thursday, November 9, at Ravenous Brewery on Industrial Road, beginning at 6:00 PM.

Admission for this event is a new, unwrapped toy. Financial donations are also welcome. Monies raised will be used to purchase more toys. According to Event Organizer Bob Salvas, last year brought in over 300 gifts. He is hoping to bring in more than 500 gifts during the event night.

Besides collecting toys, the night will feature live music by The StrumDawgs, and a free BBQ buffet provided by Bugg'd Out BBQ.

Salvas said that the event has easily become one of the most popular Toys for Tots events in the region.

"I am eternally grateful for the outpouring of support for this event," said Salvas. "Area businesses are stepping up once again to help those in our communities who are struggling. The holidays should be one of happiness and cheer. However, that isn't always the case. We are out there to put more smiles on people's faces, as the holidays draw closer."

In February 2009, local networker, Dan Edmonds, put together a networking event for all the businesspeople who were part of his LinkedIn group. Hundreds of people packed the CBS Scene in Foxborough, MA, that night. Dan knew he was onto something. Several of Dan's friends stepped up to help him and encouraged him to do a networking event every month. That was the beginning of what would later be known as 4th Monday Networking.

Dan also launched an idea to bring a new, unwrapped gift, in lieu of charging a small fee to attend his November networking event. The toys collected would be donated to Toys for Tots. That event took off: the U.S. Marines gratefully gathered up all the donations, and an annual tradition began.

Dan continued with hosting his monthly networking events, punctuated by his annual Toys for Tots drive, until he stepped down in November 2015.

He handed the reins over to Salvas, who continued 4th Monday Networking. Dan promoted it online and attended whenever he visited the area. Bob agreed and Dan had only one stipulation: Bob had to run an annual Toys For Tots event. It was an easy "yes" for Bob, who was already a big supporter of children's causes.

The 4Th Monday Networking and Toys for Tots events continued with Bob at the helm for the next several years. The pandemic, in 2020, canceled almost all in-person events. Compounding the news was Edmonds passing away on July 24, 2020.

"In addition to the sadness of losing a good friend that year, I could not even run the Toys for Tots event that Dan cared so much about," said Bob.

"So, when 2021 rolled around and things were starting to reopen, I made the decision that I needed to do a bigger Toys for Tots event, both to honor Dan, and to make up for not having one in 2020."

Bob lined up friends and sponsors to help. He got Ravenous Brewing Company to donate their space, and he brought in live music and food. Bob knew that to ramp up the toy donations, he needed to make it more of a social event than a networking event.

His plan worked. Over 100 people showed up on Wednesday November 10, 2021, and donated over 200 toys. Even Salvas could not have foreseen what would happen next.

"I originally thought this would be a one-time event, and it would go back to being part of my regular networking events. However, my friends encouraged me to do this again. It was reminiscent of when Dan's friends, (including me), encouraged him to continue his events after the initial success of CBS Scene. It was a kind of a 'full circle' moment for me."

Bob held another event in 2022, and this time, had 150 people and over 300 toys donated. With this year's event, Bob is hoping for 200 people and 500 toys!

They say the third time's a charm, so expectations are that this one will be the best one yet!

In addition to Ravenous Brewery, Bugg'd Out BBQ, 4th Monday Networking, Englund Studio, W. Parmentier Photography, Triforce Advisors, PuroClean, and Trust Networking, are all co-sponsoring the event.

For more information or to register to attend the event, go to https://businessesgiveback.com/.

