

## Holiday Heroes continue putting smiles on the faces of York Region kids



**By Brock Weir**

This week, kids around the world will be jumping out of their beds after a sleepless night, to tear open the tempting packages that have been tantalizing them in the days leading up for Christmas.

While the presents Santa Claus brought overnight have their own magic, the presents left under the tree earlier by parents, grandparents, and siblings can be equally tantalizing and equally satisfying to open.

As broad as the smiles will be on the kids' faces as they open up these early arrivals, it will be a toss-up to see if they will be broader than the ones of the Holiday Heroes in our community who helped make some of these early bird gifts a reality.

Once again, York Regional Police have teamed up with the Children's Aid Society of York Region and the Salvation Army, to host the Holiday Heroes Campaign, which collects toys, clothing and other gifts for families in need during the holiday season. In an initiative which is fast becoming a holiday tradition, York Regional Police were on hand last week to pick up a bumper crop of donations courtesy of the staff at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

"This campaign gets bigger and bigger every year and it is a great opportunity to bring people together from everywhere in our community to showcase the hard work that they put forth for the sake of our children," said Superintendent Carolyn Bishop. "As our population grows, so do the needs of our community and we are pleased to support such a great cause and we are honoured to do it along with such great partners."

Year over year, the York Regional Police are impressed with the new and innovative ideas people come up with to raise more money and collect more gifts for the kids, she said. While the money and gifts continue to roll in this year, last year's campaign collected more than \$175,000 in donations for children across the region and Bishop says she is confident 2014's numbers will be topped once all the numbers are crunched.

"With that being said, it is not about the amount we can donate," she said. "This is about making sure we can focus on every child getting a gift and enjoying the holiday season. I am proud to say that the donations raised in York Region stay in York Region."

For Dr. Dave Williams, President and CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre, the Holiday Heroes campaign is all about community. While the holiday season can mean different things to different people, it is fundamentally about celebrating with friends and loved ones, and celebrating the importance of the community.

"There is no better way to celebrate the importance of our community than to be able to reach out and be able to help those in need,

particularly during the holiday season," said Dr. Williams. "We recognize there is a wide variation of resources we all have and the ability to provide for those we care for the most is what is so unique about this event.

"We are very fortunate to have a really remarkable community. In the hospital, we benefit from the support of the community as a hospital. This is our chance to give back to the community. You think about the smiles that are going to be on the faces of kids when they get these presents and that's what makes it really worthwhile. It is truly about family and community, and sharing with each other during this time."

While the partners have been impressed with the money and donations received thus far, they are finding once again there is a trend that is creating a bit of a gap. As colourful toys were loaded into the truck outside of Southlake, Superintendent Bishop noted that one particular area that is often forgotten are kids who are a little bit older, between the ages of 12 and 14, who might be more difficult to buy for, but are no less needy. Clothing is always welcome, as are electronics, gift cards, and movie passes.

"[The most rewarding aspect of this] is seeing the boundless depths that our folks can really dig down and find charity in their heart," said Bishop. "It really is there, don't give up hope. I know people read bad news stories all the time, but there is a lot of good out there and a lot of good in people."