

OPERATION ELVES COMMUNITY

Giving to Those in Need



2022 Operation Santa Wrap Up

Last week, I was able to connect with Anissa and Aaron Allumbaugh, from the Elks, to see hear how the 2022 Operation Santa distribution went. This is the 3rd year that the Elks have been responsible for this important Christmas initiative and with every year, they learn more and it gets a little smoother and a lot more efficient.

Beginning two weeks before Thanksgiving up and up until December 18, twelve Elve (Elk) volunteers put together and distributed Christmas packages to 831 individuals who had put in an application expressing the need for help at Christmas. That total represents 757 children and 74 seniors in the communities in and near Farmington Maine.

Given what has been happening with gas prices and inflation, the Elks saw an increase in requests for the necessities: coats, boots, hats, and gloves. So our focus on blankets and hats sets was essential to this year's packages.

Another way to look at what was distributed to those during Christmas is the Elks system of tracking both monetary and what they call "product" (actual items donated). This year, they distributed \$64,000 in items, another \$11,000 from the money they raised during the year, and another \$6,500 from the National Elks Foundation. In total that represents, over \$80,000 to fund this year's distribution efforts.

My conversation with Aaron and Anissa reinforced the importance of the gifts we send up for distribution. Blankets and hat sets help to keep children and seniors warm inside and out and the books for kids is both a gift and an investment in learning.

As I ended my call with Aaron and Anissa, I asked them if there was any message they wanted me to send back to you, the Operation Elves. And they simply said in their usual modest and heartfelt way: "Please tell everyone that we want to say thank you for your help... without your efforts there would be so much less to give. Also, we can never have enough blankets"

As we close out 2022, I hope you feel proud that you made a difference in the lives of so many. And I truly thank everyone for your interest in the organization, sharing the message with others, and giving in whatever way you can: For some, it is the creating, for others, it is your shopping prowess and for others, it is your monetary contribution that helps us buy a few extras for those in need. And let me add my "thank you" as well!

Like all organizations, we start again for 2023! I hope you will join us and make 2023 even more amazing!

Volume 12 - February 2023

Updates for this issue

2023 Operation Santa gift goals

Blankets - 265 (26% to goal)

Hat Sets - 200 (32% to goal)

Books - 175 (32% to goal)

2023 current gift count

Blankets - 69

Hat Sets - 63

Books: 55

Special Thanks

A big shout-out to individuals who have contributed to this year's goal in the past two months! A special thank you to:

- Ted D
- Beverly N
- Jenny W & HRBPs
- Jean Stack

How Can You Get Involved

You can reach me (melissa stack) at:

- jusmel@comcast.net
- www.operationelvescommunity.org
- [venmo:@melissa-stack-3](https://venmo.com/melissa-stack-3)
- 615-631-4920

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The next issue will be in April 2023.



SPOTLIGHT - LISA LEDOUX

When I first started telling others about my goal to help Operation Santa, Lisa was one of the first people to start donating to the cause. While Lisa won't admit to any "crafty" talents, she is a legendary bargain shopper (with really good taste). So before I knew it, I was getting boxes and boxes from QVC that had beautiful and fun blankets in them. In a worthy cause, help comes in so many ways.... and being a good blanket shopper is a skill we need. I am so grateful that Lisa so willingly and generously started giving and has been a continuous donation since. I thought you might like to know a little more about this special elf. Here are her words to a couple of questions I asked.

Tell me a little about you. I know you are from Massachusetts. How long did you live there and where else have you lived.

I am originally from Massachusetts. I moved to Atlanta around the time of the Olympics and lived there for 19 years. I then moved to Ohio where I met my fiancé. I've since lived in Nashville and now reside in Norfolk, Virginia. I plan to retire here.

You were about the fifth person who jumped right in and sent blankets as we started to reach out past my mother and me. What appealed to you? What made you want to help?

I learned about your efforts through a co-worker, and I thought the best thing I could do to help women and their children was to provide a few warm and fun things. Being originally from the Northeast, I liked the idea of helping folks from my home region. Also, I really respect that, despite how busy you are, you take on this amazing cause with professionalism and inclusivity. Helping support a colleague who is trying to help other women is the least I can do.

I know you are a QVC zealot and you pick out the cutest blankets. How did you decide on a blanket?

I started by only buying Peanuts-themed blankets. I figured that getting a blanket may not be as fun as getting toys, but I know that these blankets are warm and the themes are fun. The Peanuts brought me a lot of joy as a child, and I have many Snoopy-themed artworks in my house by the artist Tom Everhart. I hope it makes the owners smile when they use the blankets. I do love these blankets. One year I gave seven of these blankets to family and friends for the holidays. It's a way I like to express love and warmth.

QVC makes it so easy to give to your charity. I put your name and address in my QVC address book and whenever I see a warm, beautiful blanket, especially when it's on sale, I ship them off. That's why you may get blankets from me in the summer. The more deals I can score, the more stuff I can give. It's kind of like a game where the families benefit.

What causes specially speak to your heart and why.

I sponsor a child in Sri Lanka, and I wanted to make sure it was a girl. I think when we help girls get a good education, the world is a better place. I also donate time and money to causes that address food insecurity. My mother is an immigrant, and she is always amazed at how a wealthy country can have hungry people in it. It's a message I heard all my life, and it's a way I can help.

Lisa LeDoux



"I get more joy out of being an elf than what you possibly can give away"

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Q&A About Operation Elves

I was recently having dinner with a friend and she was asking me a number of questions about Operations Elves and that got me thinking,... others might have similar questions. Like most good causes, we evolve as we grow and figure out what works and what we could improve on. So here are some Q&As I get on a regular basis that might be of interest.

What items are you collecting?

Our 1st priority is to collect blankets, hat sets, and books for children ages 0 - 18. This is what we give an updated count of in each newsletter. If we received any monetary donations, we use the money for buying "extras" geared toward young adults. This would include items like tents, sleeping bags, earbuds, cosmetic bags for girls, etc. Additionally, we do collect/buy a variety of items that we can get a good price on, and what we get may change from year to year. This year, we have been able to get 29 winter jackets and over 39 stuffed animals.

Who is the target audience?

Currently, we give all the items we have collected to the Farmington Elks and they handle all the distribution. Their 1st priority is serving the financially challenged children in the Farmington County area of Maine. However, in that same area, there is a population of elderly who also face financial challenges. So last year, we started to donate blankets to that group as well.

When do we deliver the items collected?

We target the 1st or 2nd week in October to be ready to head North with everything we have collected. Our goal is to get the items to the Farmington Elks early enough that they can determine what they need to buy in addition to the donated items they have received. Applications go out to the county in October and need to be returned in early November. Distribution to each family starts around the Thanksgiving weekend.

What is the best way to support Operations Elves?

If you are crafty or know someone who is, we are always looking for blankets, hats, and scarves. (We would love to increase our elves' community so let us know if we can add a name to our distribution list.) If you are not crafty, you can buy these items and have them shipped to me. Or if it is easier, you can give us money and we will collect the items. All money received goes directly to obtaining items for the children and the elderly. Any additional costs like boxes, and supplies (to make some of the blankets or buy additional books, etc) come from donations from my consulting business. I started my consulting business, Beaconhill Training & Development, in part to be able to give back to those in need. So a percentage of what I bring in goes to helping Operations Elves do good work for those who need a little extra boost.

Volume 13 - April 2023
Updates for this issue

2023 Operation Santa gift goals

Blankets - 265 (42% to goal)
Hat Sets - 200 (66% to goal)
Books - 175 (39% to goal)

2023 current gift count

Blankets - 110
Hat Sets - 123
Books: 68

Special Thanks

A big shout-out to individuals who have contributed to this year's goal in the past two months! A special thank you to:

- Barbara O
- Keith & Shirley F
- Regina T
- Beverly N
- Kathy B
- Donna D
- Jean S

How Can You Get Involved

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- jusmel@comcast.net
- www.operationelvescommunity.org
- [venmo:@melissa-stack-3](https://venmo.com/melissa-stack-3)
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SPOTLIGHT – ASURION HR TEAM

For those of you who are not aware, before I started my own consulting company, I worked for almost 13 years at Asurion - a technology company with headquarters in Nashville Tennessee. One of the first things that stood out when I interviewed and continued throughout my tenure with the company was the people. As an organization, it created an internal non-profit called Compassion Forward that gives financial support to employees in times of need. Compassion is a word I would use when describing many of the people I had a chance to work with every day. And many of those same individuals support the efforts of Operations Elves through their own individual contributions. So I am grateful for the experiences and the people I have met at Asurion.

Now I want to tell you about a group within Asurion that did something wonderful and helpful for Operations Elves during the 2022 Christmas season. One of the HR (Human Resources) teams were getting together for a 2-day team meeting. During that event, the leader (Jenny W.) wanted to have an activity that would be fun, give back and allow for a little friendly competition & teamwork. So she decided to task the group with seeing how many no-sew blankets they could complete in a couple of hours. And guess who was going to get all the finished blankets..... yes, Operation Elves!

This team of approximately 35 individuals put together 12 colorful, fun & warm blankets that we will be sending up North this fall! What a great way to combine teamwork, the holiday spirit, and helping others all into one activity. And I am extremely grateful that they choose to give their handiwork to Operation Elves!

Thank you, Asurion HR Team, for your contribution to this year's goal. We hope you not only had fun but also know how grateful a child will be to receive one of your blankets at Christmas this year!

Asurion HR Team



"Our team meeting was a great opportunity to come together, for the 1st time since COVID, and give back to those in need. The competition among team members added to the fun and helped us to complete all the blankets. Great way do good and connect with each other!"

Jenny W

OPERATION ELVES COMMUNITY

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SPOTLIGHT OPERATIONS Elf Contributor **Paula Ferguson**

In Volume 5, I did a spotlight on my very creative friend, Sheri Ferguson. In this month's newsletter, I am happy to introduce another Ferguson, Paula, Sheri's mom. Creativity is definitely a family thing here. While Paula tends to prefer being in the background, if you have donated something to the Operation Elves and received a hat or a bag that is the work of Paula.

Every time I have reached out to have something made either as a "thank you" or as part of the Diggity Dog book club (a year-long of book giving to the 2nd graders of Blue Hill Academy school in Wilton ME). It is the generosity of Sheri, and her mom that allows us to be able to give away items to either donators or children. It is Paula and her embroidery or vinyl machine that makes beautiful hats & bags. And if she isn't donating her time to make these gifts, she can be found making quilts - and last year she donated a beautiful one that I am sure made a little girl very happy and warm.

Paula is an avid golfer (so is her daughter) and when I asked her how she got started doing embroidery, she told me the funniest story, Paula had a friend whom she wanted to play golf with but the woman was debating between golf vs. buying an embroidery machine (they are definitely an "investment" purchase). So Paula went to a few stores to learn about this embroidery machine so she would have all the info she needed to talk her friend out of buying the machine. Well instead of influencing her friend, Paula become so intrigued with the machine - she ended up buying one and has been a machine embroiderer ever since. She has also embraced machine quilting and even got her daughter, Sheri, hooked on machine quilting.

While embroidering and quilting is mostly a hobby for Paula, she will occasionally do a "paid job" and she is the reason we are able to give the wonderful thank you gifts we can - because she donates her time to create each gift.

I am extremely grateful for Paula's generosity and her talent. I think we can all agree that the combined creative talents of Sheri and her mom, benefit both Operations Elves donations and gift giving. Thanks for being such a special elf, Paula, and for being a part of the group!

Volume 14 - June 2023 Updates for this issue

2023 Operation Santa Gift Goals

Blankets - 265 (60% to goal)
Hat Sets - 200 (70% to goal)
Books - 175 (99% to goal)

2023 current gift count

Blankets - 160
Hat Sets - 140
Books: 173

Special Thanks

A big shout-out to individuals who have contributed to this year's goal in the past two months! A special thank you to:

- Asurion HR Team
- Barbara O
- Keith & Shirley F
- Teresa & Mike K
- Beverly N
- Sue & Don M

How Can You Get Involved

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- jusmel@comcast.net
- www.operationelvescommunity.org
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"EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA- READ ALL ABOUT IT"

As I have mentioned before, each year a miracle seems to happen and it allows us to give more than just the basics to Operation Elves. Our first goal is to provide blankets, hat sets & books. Sometimes, we get some cash donations and we use that money to buy some "extras". It looks like for the 2023 season, we will be able to provide a couple of different types of extras!

Stuffed Animals

Due to some really savvy bargain shoppers (Beverly & Shirley), we currently have 41 stuffed animals ready to go.

Winter Jackets

By chance, I was at the right place at the right time and got a great price on winter jackets. So we have 29 jackets that will keep children warm for the winter.

Young Adults Gifts

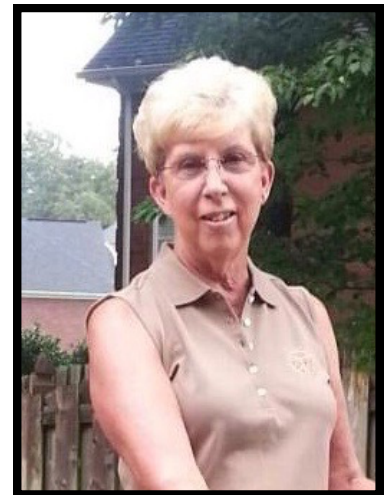
While I am the first one to say I love buying gifts for the little ones, I worry that it is the young adults who get forgotten at Christmas time especially when money is in short supply. Thanks to a couple of wonderful elves who made large donations, we will be able to buy tents, sleeping bags, earbuds & cosmetic bags & supplies for this group. With the sewing help of Mindy M, we have targeted 40 cosmetic bags to complete. As of today, we have 29 made and filled.

Elderly

Last year, we were able to make/buy blankets for the elderly in need. And the goal was to be able to do it again this year. Our goal is to have 40 blankets for this group by October 1st. Today we are at 29. I believe with a little help, we will reach this goal too. Additionally, we are adding toiletrie bags to the list for this group. Our goal is 40 and today we have 14 completed.

We are grateful for all the types of donations we get whether that is money that we use to buy "extras", a bargain hat or stuffed animal, or handmade items - it all goes to make Christmas special for those in need.

Paula Ferguson



"I love giving away the things I make"

OPERATION ELVES COMMUNITY

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SPOTLIGHT OPERATIONS Elf Contributor **Kathy Goman**

This month's spotlight is on one of my sister-in-law's, Kathy Gomen. Kathy has focused on finding interesting titles that will appeal to young adult readers. And as I have mentioned before, this tends to be a group that is forgotten at Christmas time, so I truly appreciate her focus on this group of children. Like a few of our contributors, Kathy is reluctant to be in the spotlight, so I gave her a couple of questions to answer so that you might get to know her.

Why Focus on Young Adult (YA) books?

I started to read YA books because Kyra (one of my daughters) recommended a book. It was a good way to connect with my own children and I found the books to be interesting. We started doing it when she was in middle school and it was a great way to have a discussion with her. She still passes a YA book along to me from time to time. John (my husband) and I have both read YA books that all three of our children have recommended to us and occasionally on a long drive we would listen to a YA audiobook together as a family. I believe YA books are a great way to encourage kids to read and get connected with their peers and parents, while also making the world larger, helping them learn ways to navigate difficult situations, and potentially helping them to feel less alone.

Are you a big reader? What types of books do you like to read?

I have become mostly an audiobook listener while I drive or clean. I enjoy memoirs, fiction, and non-fiction books that address social issues, and I still read books based on our kids' recommendations.

Besides the fact that you are supporting a family member by contributing to Operation Elves, why are you involved?

I enjoy supporting charities, especially in fun ways, and for me picking out books to donate is fun.

Are there other charities you support?

Planned Parenthood, Human Rights Campaign, The Trevor Project, and my local animal shelter.

I'd say that helping others is in Kathy's DNA personally and professionally. She previously was a counselor and today helps individuals to navigate insurance and providers to get the mental health services they need. She is compassionate and caring with a quiet feistiness that makes her an everyday hero for those who need someone in their corner. Thanks for being a special elf every day.

Volume 15 - August 2023 **Updates for this issue**

2023 Operation Santa **Gift Goals**

Blankets - 265 (81% to goal)
Hat Sets - 200 (73% to goal)
Books - 175 (123% to goal)

2023 current gift count

Blankets - 215
Hat Sets - 145
Books: 215

Special Thanks

A big shout-out to individuals who have contributed to this year's goal in the past two months! A special thank you to:

- Beverly N
- Mindy M

How Can You Get Involved

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- jusmel@comcast.net
- www.operationelvescommunity.org
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"THE FINAL PUSH"

It is hard to believe that we are in August already! And that means, we have 2 1/2 months before we will be making the journey up North to deliver all our goodies for 2023. Wanted to give everyone an update on where we stand with our goals for 2023.

Books

We have officially reached our goal for this year. In fact, we have exceeded it. However, we could use a few extra books for young adults. So if you would like to follow Kathy Gomen's example, we would love to have a few more of these.

Blankets

We are going to be close on this one as we are about 50 blankets short of our goal. Thanks to a big sale at Joann's, my Mom and I picked up some more fleece and will be busy the next 2 months making blankets.

Hat Sets

We are in the final push to get another 55 hat sets ready for our trip up North. We have word that a couple of our elves have hats on the way and the rest we will get using some of the money that was graciously donated.

Elderly

There are three types of gifts we are working on this year: blankets (45), socks (45), and toiletries bags (40). As of this newsletter, we are at 343 blankets, 39 socks, and 32 toiletries bags.

Extras

in June's newsletter, we told you about some of the "extras" we will be able to secure thanks to the generosity of some of our members in terms of money donations or great bargain shopping. We are planning to use some of the money to buy tents, sleeping bags, and earbuds for young adults.

Additionally, we are working on making and filling 40 cosmetic bags which as of this newsletter we are up to 39. We are also trying to get some baby blankets & bib sets ready to deliver to the WMCA (Western Maine Community Action) organization for new babies in need. As of this newsletter, we have 6 sets completed and are hoping to get 10 ready for the October delivery date.

As always, we are soooooo grateful for the generosity of our contributors that help us to make Christmas special and keep children in need warm!

Kathy Goman



"Picking out books is a fun way to give"

OPERATION ELVES COMMUNITY

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SPOTLIGHT OPERATIONS Elf Contributor **Joy Arsenault**

This month's spotlight is on Joy Arsenault who participated in the 1st Operation Elves Volunteer Day! This 1st volunteer day was a party of two (Joy and I). And while we may have only been two, it is amazing what you can accomplish in a couple of hours with an extra pair of hands. Joy wanted to help (volunteer) and originally thought we "wrapped" all the gifts and that was a task she enjoyed and is good at. While she was disappointed that her wrapping skills would not be put to the test and she admitted to not being very crafty, we found a number of tasks that she excelled at and a few, she doesn't want to ever do again! With Joy's help, we put together 12 toiletries bags for the seniors, ironed 8 new toiletries bags so they could be assembled, and even tried cutting out one bag (that task she won't do again .. something about being afraid of sharp knives and cutting instruments)! It was extremely helpful to have an extra pair of hands for an afternoon.

So who is Joy and why does she volunteer to be an elf? I am fortunate to have met Joy through a mutual friend a couple of years ago. She is a transplant to TN (as most of us are) and originally comes from upstate NY – near where my husband grew up – Utica NY to be exact. Operation Elves is not Joy's first volunteering experience; in fact, her first job out of college was at the America Corps. Giving back is in her blood and she credits her dad for being an example of giving to others in need. Joy believes in paying it forward and sharing with others as she feels her life is blessed in many ways.

I always find it fascinating to find out something new or special about people. And no matter how much you know, there is always something you don't. Joy is no exception. What you might not know about Joy when you first met her is her fascination with learning how to make fun, fancy drinks. One of her favorite drinks to make (and to taste too) is called the Razzle Dazzle. And I have had a few of Joy's drinks and they are both delicious and sneaky in their potency Definitely need to sip them!

Thank you, Joy, for your interest in the work of Operation Elves, your giving spirit, and your willingness to volunteer your time on a Sunday to help us get ready for our upcoming delivery!

Volume 16 - October 2023
Updates for this issue

2023 Final Operation Santa Gift Counts

Blankets - 293 (111% to goal)
Hat Sets - 250 (125% to goal)
Books - 218 (125% to goal)

Special Thanks

A big shout-out to individuals who have contributed to this year's goal in the past two months! A special thank you to:

- Maryann S
- Beverly N
- Mindy M
- Barbara O
- Kathy B
- Lisa L
- Joy A

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"ROAD TRIP – HEADED NORTH SOON

It is hard to believe that it soon will be October and we will be headed North to deliver all our donations to the Farmington Elks. We are going a little later this year as we will also be attending a fall wedding while we are there. We have confirmed with Aaron, from the Farmington Elks, that October 17th is the delivery date. So we will be starting to load up the trailer this weekend. Let me know if you have any last-minute donations. In our December newsletter, we will have pictures from the trip & share with you how many boxes it took to deliver all our donations.

I am thrilled and humbled by all the help this year, both in terms of donations (money or items)! And once again, we not only achieved the goals for the year but went past them. We couldn't have done that without YOU!

A HAPPY 5TH ANNIVERSARY OPERATION ELVES

It was **five** years ago when my mother and I decided to use our talents/creativity to help the community of Farmington Maine. We learned from my niece that it was an area that not only faced cold winters; it was a community that struggled financially. So we decided to help. It is now five years later, and we now have a whole group of caring individuals who are helping this community more each year. Here is what we have donated since 2018, Thanks to your generosity, we are able to continue to support this community and reach more children providing gifts that provide warmth (inside and out), provide gifts for young adults and the elderly.



Joy Arsenault

"Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive. Because what the world needs is more people who come alive".
Volunteering makes
Joy come alive!

	Cumm. Donations		Cumm. Donations
Children (1 to 18)			
Blankets	924	Journals, cosmetic bags, facial kits	137
Hat Sets	811	Winter jackets	29
Books	578	Backpacks & stuffed animals	65
Tents, sleeping bags, lanterns	32	Ear buds	15
Seniors		Babies	
Blankets	90	Blanket sets	20
Socks	50	Sleep sacks	8
Toiletries bags	62		