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Holiday Giving

“There aren’t that many dollars out there in the first place, and the government is looking for the private sector to pick up the load.”

*Captain John Wettlaufer
Salvation Army’s Elmira Citadel*

Charities, donors sense pressure of government cuts

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Lori Doyle, with her husband John, regularly contributes to a variety of charities. So she’s not all that surprised when those organizations mail appeals to their home from time to time.

However, one recent solicitation left her scratching her head. It was a letter from a woman religious representing Covenant House in New York City, which provides refuge for runaway and homeless teenagers. Although Doyle said she will probably donate a small amount to the charity, she’s still not sure how she got on Covenant House’s mailing list.

“I just laughed, ‘New York City? How did my name get to New York?’” recalled Doyle, a parishioner at Brighton’s Our Lady of Lourdes Church.

As the holiday season continues, Doyle and many others should be prepared for charitable requests in all sizes, shapes and colors — from legitimate organizations and otherwise. According to an official with the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., demand for the donated dollar hits its peak in December.

“The holidays are the biggest time for two reasons,” said Irvin Alexander, director of the council’s Philanthropic Advisory Service at the council’s national office in Arlington, Va. “People want to get their tax deductions, and also because people are in a very charitable spirit.”

One example is the Salvation Army, and its traditional “kettle appeal.” Captain John Wettlaufer, core captain for the Salvation Army’s Elmira Citadel, said his chapter seeks to raise \$64,000 this holiday season in cash contributions at Chemung County shopping centers and other businesses. This figure represents nearly 20 percent of the chapter’s total annual income, Wettlaufer added.

Yet these days, acknowledged Alexander of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, it’s hard to decipher whether the spirit of giving can keep pace with the need to receive. Alexander said there are more than 1.5 million charitable organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, and he expects the number to increase.

“Without a question. It is becoming increasingly competitive,” Alexander remarked.

This competitiveness will intensify further if Congress carries out its planned federal spending reductions over the next seven years. According to a cover story in the Dec. 4, 1995, issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, more than \$850 billion in cuts is targeted at charitable organizations, as well as welfare and other entitlement programs.

“It’s going to get even worse,” Wettlaufer said. “There aren’t that many dollars out there in the first place, and the government is looking for the private sector to pick up the load.”

U.S. News and World Report notes that charity indeed begins at home: its cover story states that of the nation’s annual \$120 billion in private donations, less than 5 percent is the result of corporate giving.

It appears, then, that the onus will fall on individual citizens to compensate for the reduction of government support in charitable

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S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Wally Gallup (left), representing the Salvation Army, receives a donation from 4-year-old Matthew Lombardo at Eastview Mall in Perinton.