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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**RAPPAHANNOCK UNITED WAY BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER  
TO HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

Nov. 2, 2015 – Fredericksburg, VA – Christmas of 2010 is one Joe Howell will always remember.

Howell, a Westmoreland Department of Social Services employee, helped assist a father who was out of work sign up to receive gifts for his three children. The grateful father told Howell he promised he would pay him back for all the kindness.

When Christmas approached the following year, Howell received a call asking what items their Christmas program could use. He listed board games, art items and a few other things. A few weeks before their distribution date, a tractor trailer pulled up to their building and the driver went in.

“When I went out front, I recognized the person as the gentleman our program had helped the prior Christmas,” said Howell. “He opened the back of the trailer up. Inside were a huge stack of gifts including 8 brand new bicycles...I was so amazed I was speechless.”

The man had kept his promise. After finding a long haul truck driving job and getting back on his feet, he wanted to return the favor.

“Since that year, this kind soul has visited me each year and brought a bounty of gifts to be distributed to those in need,” said Howell. “This shows us all that there is gratitude and appreciation left in this world for kind deeds shown to others. God does work miracles.”

Joe Howell is just one of the many representatives from local holiday assistance service providers who belong to the Rappahannock Region Holiday Assistance Coalition.

For more than 15 years, Rappahannock United Way has brought together these local nonprofits and organizations which provide holiday assistance to individuals and families in our community. The Coalition was formed to ensure that those in our community with the greatest needs are met – particularly low income households.

Currently there are more than a dozen local agencies working together in the Holiday Assistance Coalition led by Rappahannock United Way, including Department of Social Services, Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank, Home Instead Senior Care, Rappahannock Area Community Services Board, Rappahannock Big Brothers and Sisters, S.E.R.V.E., The Salvation Army and Toys for Tots. This group has allowed the organizations to share information and avoid duplication.

Rappahannock United Way created a Charity Tracker Network for the Holiday Assistance Coalition in 2008 to create a more streamlined approach to track all individuals served in a centralized database. The web-based system helps insure that donations are being given to those who need them most during the holidays.

“There should be an award for the creation of Charity Tracker,” said David Coman, of the King George Department of Social Services. “Because we can all utilize the same database and track donations, we have been able to conserve on duplication of efforts and spread the savings to others who needed our help and would not have had it otherwise. We hope that all charitable organizations will join us in this effort. I simply love it.”

***If you know someone in need this holiday season or want to help others this year, now is the time to act.***

“Often donors are not thinking about Christmas shopping until early to mid-December each year, but this is often too late to really help the Holiday Assistance programs,” said Sarah Walsh, Rappahannock United Way’s Vice President of Community Impact. “We need donations in hand by late November to allow enough time for distribution to the families being helped.”

“We always see increased needs around the holidays,” said Terri Center, who coordinates volunteers at Rappahannock United Way. “People often want to help others and give back to our community this time of year, but aren’t sure where to start. Rappahannock United Way’s volunteer website [www.RUWVolunteer.org](http://www.RUWVolunteer.org) is a great one-stop resource. Volunteers are needed to collect, sort, wrap and deliver donated items through November and into December.”

For a list of local Holiday Volunteer Opportunities and Donation Needs, go to [www.RUWVolunteer.org](http://www.RUWVolunteer.org). To find out where to get help with holiday assistance, food assistance, and heating and weatherization assistance, go to [www.RappahannockUnitedWay.org](http://www.RappahannockUnitedWay.org) for a printable Holiday & Winter Assistance guide.

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