



LOCAL NEWS

Festival of Trees draws record crowds

by [jgoralski](#) • November 22, 2017 • [0 Comments](#)



Junior Teen Miss Southington Haley Derwin, left, and 2017 Apple Harvest Festival Queen Molly Wright, right, showcase the trees on display for the auction. (Photo by Janelle Morelli)

By SHERIDAN CYR

STAFF WRITER

The United Way of Southington held their annual Festival of Trees, one of their largest fundraising events of the year, on Wednesday, Nov. 15 at the Aqua Turf with their most successful attendance yet at over 200 people.

“The event was successful beyond our expectations,” said executive director Jack Eisenmann. “It went as well as it possibly could have.”

Festival of Trees is designed to be a kick-off to the holiday shopping season. The United Way hosts a live and silent auction on holiday trees, decorations, gift baskets and more, all generously donated by local businesses. All funds collected from the auction are turned right back to the Southington community through projects supported by the United Way.

This year, the event was coordinated by co-chairs Nicole Roy and Joyce Jenkins. Eisenmann reported that with their help, the United Way took their list of business contacts from about 200 to over 400. "They took it to heights we never imagined," he said.

Roy said in the past, just one woman served as chair, Barbara McKay. In her vacancy, two co-chairs took over, and sought to build upon her foundation.

"We were so fortunate to have so much support from the town, and all that support is going to something great," said Roy.


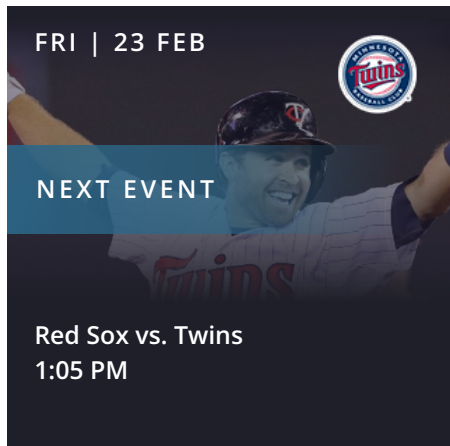

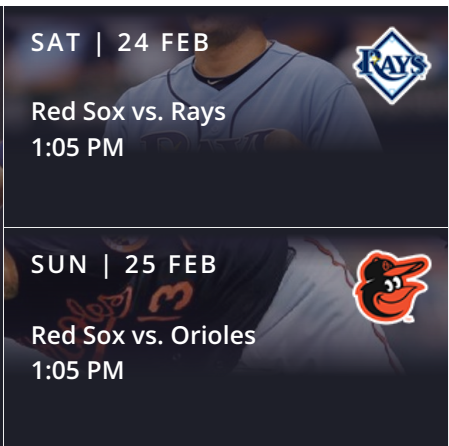

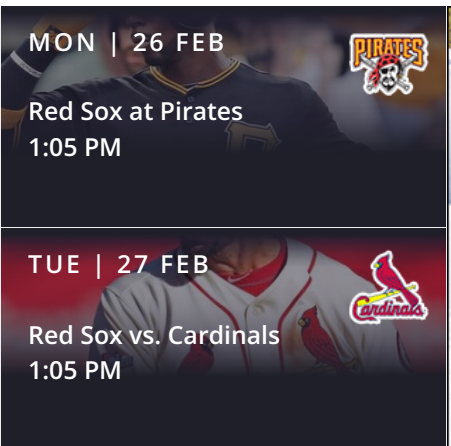

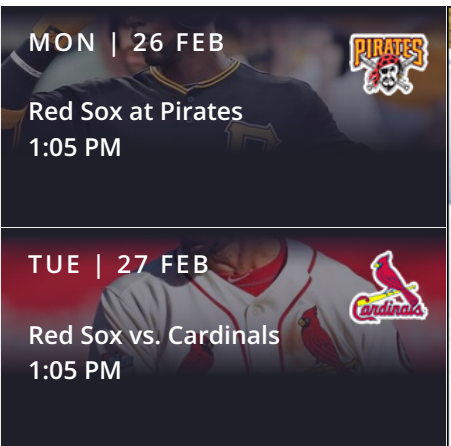
The United Way has programs that assist Southington residents from young to old, from elderly assistance in transportation, to a "backpack project" that provides students with school supplies. Last year, Roy said, the United Way donated about \$20,000 to the food pantry at Southington Community Services.

Through their fundraising and teamwork with community service groups in town, the United Way supports over 10,000 Southington residents who are financially challenged to meet basic survival needs, such as food, housing, childcare, health care and more. Roy said approximately 29 percent of Southington households are affected by financial hardships.

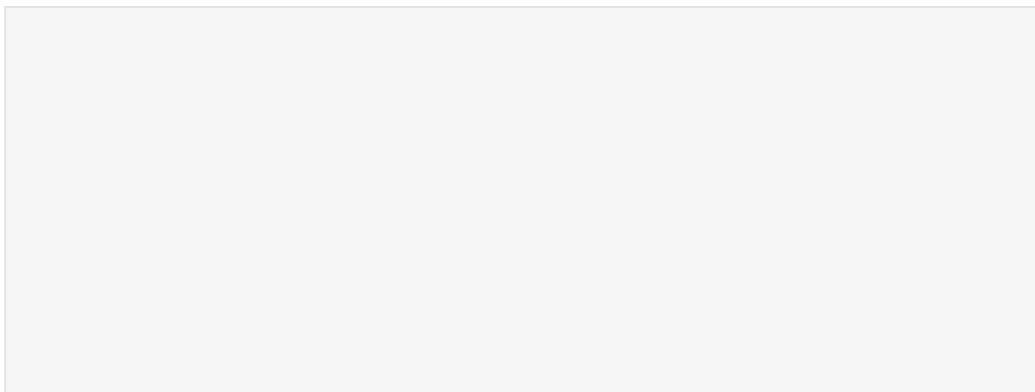
Eisenmann said that the annual fundraising campaign is going well. They



Jodie Cormier enjoys the decorated tree that she won during the silent auction. (Photo by Janelle Morelli)

<p>FRI 23 FEB</p>   <p>NEXT EVENT</p> <p>Red Sox vs. Twins 1:05 PM</p>	<p>SAT 24 FEB</p>   <p>Red Sox vs. Rays 1:05 PM</p>	<p>MON 26 FEB</p>   <p>Red Sox at Pirates 1:05 PM</p>	  <p>Red Sox vs. Cardinals 1:05 PM</p>
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recently connected with two new companies, Webster Bank and COCC, who were both major sponsors at the Festival of Trees. He also said he is hoping to expand individual campaigns—contributions made by single persons—to 1,000 people this year, as well as grow their volunteer base.





The United Way Board and volunteers gather at the trees. (Photo by Janelle Morelli)

With the help of a generous \$40,000 grant from the Main Street Community Foundation, the United Way is working on improving and expanding their senior transportation services. Volunteer drivers would bring elderly to medical appointments, trips to the pharmacy, assist with shopping and more. Mileage would be reimbursed, and seniors benefit not only from the service but from the companionship.

"I can't tell you how thrilled I am that this is happening," said Eisenmann. There is no public transportation in Southington, and it is an "unmet need," he said.

To find out more about the United Way of Southington visit their office at Factory Square, 37 W. Center St. or at unitedwayofsouthington.org. Call them at (860) 628-4565.

To comment on this story or to contact staff writer Sheridan Cyr, email her at SCyr@SouthingtonObserver.com.

Photos by JANELLE MORELLI







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