

Donate costumes for needy children

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By TONY DI DOMIZIO

Here's a treat for Halloween — donating gently-used Halloween costumes for needy youths.

The generous idea of Halloween Helpers came from the heart of 11-year-old Wynnewood resident Emma Rose Shapiro.

"She was going through her closet and found costumes she had outgrown and was disinterested in, and I challenged her to come up with an idea of what can you do with a dozen previously-used costumes?" said Ilyse Shapiro. "Some kids are fortunate to get or make a new costume every year, and she realized other kids never get costumes in their short childhood."

The Shapiros looked around to partner Halloween Helpers with a community program or nonprofit. They found one in the Norristown Police Athletic League.

Through Oct. 8, numerous collection sites across the Delaware County will accept gently-used or "previously-enjoyed" costumes for children ages 12 and under.

After Oct. 8, the costumes will be cleaned, bagged and tagged and distributed by the Norristown PAL on Oct. 19 and 20.

"Our goal is to collect 1,000. We have about 200 now," Shapiro said. "We are looking for infant size to larger size costumes. They do need to be clean and we prefer them to be complete."

Those children who will benefit from the donations will receive fliers on where to take part in safe parades, like at churches or recreation centers.

"We put the plan together so in future years we are hoping lots of churches and recreation centers hold parades and dress-up events," Shapiro said.

The response, she said, has been phenomenal.

"Churches, synagogues, Boy Scout troops and Girl Scout troops, so many places are holding costume drives because they want to share the joy of Halloween and make sure children experience a fantastic Halloween," Shapiro said.

The Indian Valley YMCA in Lower Salford is one of the drop-off points for Halloween Helpers, between Sept. 19 and Sept. 25.

"This is the first time we have heard of this project and we think it is a great opportunity for us to be a drop-off location in the community," said Betty Linko, chief operating officer of the North Penn YMCA and executive director of Indian Valley and Lansdale YMCAs. "We have a lot of families — about 70 percent of our members are families — that are able to donate gently-used costumes."

The Indian Valley YMCA is no stranger to charity. It hosts baby bundle drives, where people donate formula, diapers and the like to be packaged for needy moms. It also takes part in Stuff the Bus, a United Way fundraiser, and has accepted donations to be packaged for soldiers in the Middle East.

"We offer to be a drop-off location and we are supportive of local projects in the community, like those of the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts and local organizations," Linko said. "Anything to put a smile on a child's face is a great opportunity."

Shapiro said the news of Halloween Helpers has spread through the help of churches, day camps and schools.

"Communities are behind this 100 percent. They want to get on the bandwagon," she said.

Local drop-off points and dates of participation are as follows:

Now through Sept. 25 at Elmwood Park Zoo, 1661 Harding Blvd., Norristown.

Sept. 19 to Sept. 25 at the Indian Valley branch of the North Penn YMCA, 890 Maple Ave., Harleysville.

Sept. 14 to Sept. 21 at Carson Valley Children's Aid, 1419 Bethlehem Pike, Flourtown.

Sept. 21 to Oct. 3 at five Continental Bank locations: 599 Skippack Pike, Blue Bell; 113 W. Germantown Pike, East Norriton; 436 Egypt Road, West Norriton; 661 W. Germantown Pike, Plymouth Meeting; and 197 E. DeKalb Pike, King of Prussia.

Sept. 23 to Oct. 2 at St. Philip Neri School, 3015 Chestnut St., Lafayette Hill.

Visit www.thehalloweenhelpers.com for drop-off locations and up-to-date information, or call (610) 639-9460, if interested in being a drop-off site.