

December 13, 2003

The Arizona Republic, Phoenix, AZ

SALVATION ARMY RINGERS COLLECTING UNTIL DEC. 24

The man in the gray pinstripe suit is wearing a wide smile and snappy red Santa hat. Add the little bell that he's constantly ringing and he's not easy to miss outside AJ's Purveyors of Fine Foods at Camelback Road and Central Avenue.

Within minutes of setting up the familiar red kettle to collect money for the Salvation Army, volunteer Roger Marce has a more than a willing donor. Nine-year-old Robyn Trujillo spies the kettle as she comes out the door. Balancing a bakery box of tarts, she slips money into the slot. She smiles. Marce smiles. So does Robyn's dad, Rob Trujillo, 38. But the father's smile only broadens as he listens to his daughter's explanation of her donation.

"I wanted to help so I could get money to other kids that don't have money for the things they need," the fourth-grade student from Madison Rose Lane Elementary School says.

That loose change or dollar bill does make a difference, Salvation Army officials say. Last year, "red kettle" collections brought in \$1 million in donations Valley-wide.

The Salvation Army's kettle drive runs from the day after Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve. Valley-wide, the Salvation Army serves more than 6,200 meals to the needy on Christmas Day. Throughout the holiday season (Thanksgiving and Christmas), it serves more than 150,000 people, said Misty Millhorn, a Salvation Army spokeswoman.

For five years -- maybe six, now, Marce says -- he's been volunteering to man a kettle for the Salvation Army.

Marce, 63, lives in Phoenix and is president of Manufacturers Lease Plans Inc., a high-tech equipment leasing company based in Phoenix. But he also has been a longtime member of the Salvation Army advisory board.

His company has 19 employees. Sixteen of them will be serving in teams of two this season to ring bells to entice donors. Marce did his shift Wednesday afternoon with Steve AmRhein, 44, a vice president with the company.

It was AmRhein's first time, and Marce didn't offer any suggestions. Other than ring the bell and look people in the eye. And, of course, smile.

"We understand that we're giving something back to the community," Marce said of his company's effort. "It helps build esprit de corps. We all have our lives when we leave the office at five; with this, we have a common bond."

The money collected at the kettles funds 21 local Salvation Army programs throughout the year, including the homeless outreach program, the homeless and family crisis shelter, and youth, senior and education programs. The Salvation Army also uses the money for job training, tutoring, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation.