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Youngstown Christmas Basket Gift Program organizers send thanks

Dear friends, Gratitude! We hear so much about gratitude as the antidote to pessimism, loss of hope, and the darkness we sometimes find ourselves in during these very difficult times.

There are two kinds of gratitude: There is the kind that we feel when we receive and another kind when we give. They both abound in our community.

It is there within you who so graciously supported the Youngstown Christmas Basket/Gift Program. Your response to words of thanks was so often, "I'm happy to be able to help."

That is gratitude being able to give, to be of use to others. The outpouring of donations both monetary and of volunteer time were overwhelming this year. The gifts kept coming through the door, the checks appeared

daily in the mail, and volunteers stepped up in all kinds of ways. We received enough funding to be able to send each family two more rounds of gift cards to Tops and ALDI. They will be sent at the end of January and then again at the beginning of March.

Our recipients, too, are grateful for your efforts. Their words speak for themselves. We received this message from one family, "I would like to send a huge thank you for everything you did for my family. It brought us tears to our eyes and we are beyond thankful. ... Blessings and happy holidays from our family to yours, thank you so much."

Another message reads, "We appreciate it so very much, you don't know how thankful we are, and words could never

thank you all enough. This year has been tough on everyone, so it was amazing ... everything you did to lighten the load."

We are all winners in this endeavor, it's a win-win!

There are so many people to thank. Many took on organizing different aspects of the program, such as Janet Brooks, Bev Roach, Shawn Dluhy, John and Rita Rolfe, Laura Andrus, Kate and Gary Myers, Diane and Mike Blenk, and Colleen Summerville. We had the ongoing support of our local church groups, civic organizations, local businesses, U.S. Coast Guard Niagara, the Village of Youngstown, the Town of Porter, Boy Scout Troop 829 and their leaders, and the Youngstown Free Library.

A special shout-out to our extraordinary generous do-

nors, including the Youngstown Yacht Club, the estate of Marie Stephens, and our biggest supporter, the Youngstown Lions Club.

So many of you contributed in more than one way. You were angel callers, food gift card shoppers, children's gift choppers, gift wrappers, food sorters, and food collectors and packers. Some of you cleaned up, did publicity, or participated in the wonderfully organized delivery of gifts to families. There were well over 200 of you who volunteered to make this program a success.

Thank you on behalf of the 49 families and 106 children you helped this year.

Sincerely, The Youngstown/Town of Porter Holiday Basket Program Committee

Questions restricting access to NFPD reports

New York Coalition For Open Government President Paul W. Wolf recently asked City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino for more transparency in local law enforcement. He wrote:

Obtaining police arrest reports in a timely way is important for the news media to be able to provide information to the public. It is our understanding that, for decades, police incident reports were forwarded by the Niagara Falls Police Department to the media on a daily basis. We understand further that, for decades, police personnel have been available to discuss and provide information beyond reports to the news media.

It has been reported that, due to your directive, the distribution of daily incident reports by the police department to the me-

dia have stopped. Now that the city has hired a public information officer, the new procedure is that a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request must be filed to obtain arrest reports. Furthermore, police personnel are no longer being made available to the media, without first going through the public information officer.

There is nothing in the law that requires the filing of a FOIL request to obtain information. Police departments across New York state routinely provide arrest reports to the news media, as Niagara Falls did for many years.

Your position of restricting the flow of information from the police department to the public is at odds with your campaign platform that called for more

transparency in city government, prior to your election as mayor. The best way to be transparent is to proactively release information to the public without requiring the bureaucracy of a FOIL request.

For decades, the system of providing police information to the public has worked. Requiring FOIL requests and preventing police personnel from speaking directly to the public, unless cleared through the city's public information office is making the city less transparent than it was before your election.

Transparency between the police department and the public is important. The public has an interest and a right to know what police activity is occurring in their community through timely media reports.

The New York Coalition For Open Government requests that you review the impact of the new procedures you have implemented and return to the past practice of providing police incident reports on a daily basis, without the need to file a FOIL request.

At the very least, in the interest of transparency, a meeting with police officials and the news media should occur to explain the reasoning behind the new procedures and for you to hear the concerns that the media have.

Sincerely, Paul W. Wolf, Esq. President, New York Coalition For Open Government

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