

Coats for Kids keeps winter chill away

By Sue Klasky
 Correspondent

Winter will be soon upon us, and we'll be getting out those warm, winter coats for the coming snows. Yet many area children, teens and adults won't be ready for the cold weather.

Anton's Cleaners' 44 stores hope to have them prepared for the cold. Their 15th annual Coats for Kids winter coat drive has begun, which benefits those living in eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire who are in need of winter outerwear. The company hopes to collect 60,000 coats this year before Jan. 9, 2010. Locally, residents may drop off gently used, warm, wearable coats at the Anton's store at 269 North Avenue in Wakefield. Jordan's Furniture in Reading is also accepting donations for Coats for Kids.

Bob DeCarlo, manager of the Wakefield location, said, "Last year my store collected 1,600 coats. We hope to get 2,000 this year." He added that they receive a variety of types and styles of coats for little kids to adults. He also emphasized that they are all good quality clothing.

After taking in donations, Anton's provides the dry cleaning services. Since Coats for Kids began in 1994, the program has taken in more than 550,000 coats, and Anton's has donated \$6.5 million in cleaning costs.

Much of the winter wear is donated through the Corporate Partners and local school programs. There are many sponsors that provide advertising to promote Coats for Kids, explained

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DeCarlo. They include FOX25, Jordan's Furniture, KISS-108 and JAM'N-94.5. The Supporting Partners for Coats for Kids include Graham Communications and Package Supply Corporation,

"We've had local schools participate," said DeCarlo. Schools such as St. Joseph's, the Walton and the Greenwood schools have had competitions to see which school brought in the

most donated coats. The Schools Rewards Program provides an award for the top three elementary and middle schools who collect the most coats per students enrolled.

Once the clothing is collected and cleaned, it is distributed through the Coats for Kids Distribution Partners network to many non-profits and hospitals. Some of these include the Massachusetts Community Action Programs, the Salvation Army, Cradles to Crayons, the Middlesex Human Service Agency, the BU Medical Center's Outreach Van Project, the Lowell Wish Project, the Community Giving Tree, the Mental Health Association of Greater Lowell, the Strafford County Community Action, Catholic Charities, the Dorchester House MSC, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, the Carolina Hill Shelter, the Taunton State Hospital, South Shore Day Care Services, the Codman Square Health Center, the Children's Services of Roxbury/ Worcester Family Day Care, and the Harbour House Family Shelter.

Coats for Kids gets the community and businesses involved in a charity that directs its donations to people in need. DeCarlo said, "It's a great program. All of our employees help out. It's a good thing to do for the holidays."

If you would like more information on how to donate a clean,



used coat for a baby, a young child, teen or adult, call the Coats for Kids hotline at 1-800-659-0069; or the Wakefield store, 781-245-9750; visit <http://www.anton's.com/cfk> or call the Coats for Kids hotline at 1-800-659-0069. Coats for Kids is also on Facebook and Twitter.



WICKED LOCAL PHOTO BY DAVID SOKOL

Bob DeCarlo, manager of the Wakefield Anton's, says his store collected 1,600 coats last year.



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Bob DeCarlo uses steam to remove dirt and grime from a coat donated to Anton's Cleaners Annual Winter Coat drive, through Jan.