

A fruitful partnership

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Assistance League of St. Louis joined forces to distribute 4,000 books at back-to-school event

By Charlotte Beard

Every summer the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis hosts its Urban Expo Back to School and Community Empowerment Festival in collaboration with the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) at America's Center in Downtown St. Louis. However, this summer due to COVID-19 the event was a drive through which also brought on a new partner for the event – the Assistance League of St. Louis. The event took place Aug. 1 at 1408 N Kingshighway in North St. Louis City.

Assistance League of St. Louis and the Urban League has a mutual board member that introduced the organizations to each other. Frankie Eichenberger, a member of Assistance League's Advisory Council, is also a member of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis Board of Directors and the Executive Committee.

"She introduced the leaders of Assistance League of St. Louis to the leaders of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis," stated Dawn Thomas, Assistance League of St. Louis President. "Since 2019, when Urban League President and CEO Michael McMillan and Tom Bailey, Vice President of Development, visited Assistance League's headquarters, (we have) provided clothing and other items to (the organization). In April, (we) delivered 1,500 new books for pre-kindergarten to eighth graders. The books were distributed by the Urban League at the drive-through giveaways (they) hosted at locations in the city of St. Louis and Metro East since early April, giving out food and cleaning supplies to thousands of families."

According to Thomas, prior to the most recent distribution of 4,000 books at the Ur-



Submitted photo

ban League's Aug. 1 event, in October 2019 Assistance League provided 42 women's suits, infant and toddler clothing, formal wear for proms, and bags of canned goods for the Urban League's food pantry. Thomas states that the clothing consisted of contributions from its members and people in the community. Following the October contribution, they provided the organization with toys donated by Barnes and Noble of West

County, 100 hygiene kits and professional clothing for women and men entering the job market.

"Assistance League of St. Louis has had a long-standing relationship with (SLPS) that started years ago with (us) outfitting thousands of students in those schools with uniforms, outerwear and shoes," stated Thomas

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Weather

FRIDAY
 Scattered Thunderstorms
 87/71

SATURDAY
 Partly Cloudy
 90/72

SUNDAY
 Partly Cloudy
 87/67

'PARTNERSHIP' from 'cover



Assistance League of St. Louis President Dawn Thomas piles on the books for a parent at the Urban League's Urban Expo Back to School and Community Empowerment Festival.



Submitted photos

Assistance League of St. Louis Books From Friends volunteers spent Aug. 1 in North St. Louis distributing 4,000 age-appropriate books to aspiring readers at the Urban League's Urban Expo Back to School and Community Empowerment Festival, which attracts thousands each year.

of the Expo's other partner. "That relationship was made even stronger three years ago when (we) expanded (our) help by placing closets in city schools. (Those) closets are filled with school uniforms (and) a range of other clothing including undergarments, shoes, coats, plus hygiene kits to better meet the student's needs on a year-round basis."

Since Assistance League of St. Louis began over 30 years ago, its mission has been to "identify, develop, fund and implement ongoing philanthropic programs to serve specific needs of children and adults in the St. Louis community." The organization is run by 470 volunteers. Twenty of its volunteers participated in this year's drive through Urban Expo.

"This collaboration with the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Saint Louis Public Schools provided a great opportunity to help many more children in one day than we could possibly do safely at this time of COVID-19 with our in-school book festivals and other events," stated Thomas.

Thomas shared that the 4,000 new books that were given away at the event were donations from several Assistance League book drives in collaboration with the West County Barnes and Noble.

Though this year the Urban Expo could not facilitate things such as community resource booths, live entertainment, games, and rides, in addition to the books from Assistance League of St. Louis, it did provide free food for families as well as personal protective equipment, toiletries, and school supplies.

Operation Food Search holds gleaning event

Operation Food Search (OFS) and the Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE) recently created the Greater St. Louis Area Gleaning Program where a team of volunteers harvest or pick up already harvested unwanted food from a farm. The donated gleaned food is then quickly distributed to food insecure individuals and families in the region.

The program, which is designed to reduce food loss on local farms, brings volunteers to harvest what farmers cannot on their own. Gleaning increases access to healthy and fresh local food for those individuals and families experiencing food insecurity.

OFS recently hosted a volunteer gleaning event at Three Rivers Community Farm located in Elsah, Illinois. The 14-year-old Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm provides organically-grown produce for the Riverbend and St. Louis area. Thirteen volunteers harvested 224 pounds of potatoes, 180 pounds of slicing tomatoes, and 160 pounds of cherry tomatoes. The produce was distributed to OFS's network of more than 200 food pantries located throughout the bi-state region.

"Our community has truly stepped up and extended their generosity to those who need it most," said OFS Executive Director Kristen Wild. "Partners like Three Rivers Community Farm enable us to provide families with fresh food that would otherwise be wasted. We are very grateful for their support in alleviating food insecurity during the summer months."



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Operation Food Search and the Missouri Coalition for the Environment recently created the Greater St. Louis Area Gleaning Program where a team of volunteers harvest or pick up already harvested unwanted food from a farm.



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