

BUSINESS

CHRISTMAS ANGELS: Business community pays it forward

From left: Randy Milton of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, Mary Saulnier-Taylor, executive director of the Coverdale Centre for Women, and Dylan Folkins of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce. Milton and Folkins delivered personal care items to the Coverdale Centre for Women this week. Photo: Courtesy of Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce

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Noushin Ziafati | Telegraph-Journal

Editor's note: In the lead-up to Christmas, the Telegraph-Journal has featured a "Christmas angel" each day, profiling those who embody the spirit of the season by providing a helping hand to others in their community.

SAINT JOHN • The business community in Saint John is getting into the holiday spirit of giving.

Last week, Once Upon a Child Saint John owner Sharon Branch decided to pay it forward after receiving an outpouring of support from the community following an unpleasant experience with an angry customer, who verbally harassed the retail store's staff on multiple occasions.

"People were bringing in treats for us and just the kind comments on Facebook, and in person, they're still coming in," said Branch, who shared an account of the unpleasant experience in a recent Facebook post that received hundreds of reactions and dozens of comments.

"The staff were so touched by it all that they wanted to do something, and we started hearing instances from other retailers that were struggling with the same kind of issues, so my assistant manager said, 'I'm going to bake some cupcakes and take them over,' and I said, 'Well, why don't we ask the whole staff and see if they want to participate?' The staff were so excited."

Once Upon a Child Saint John staff pitched in doughnuts, brownies, cookies and other sweets to fill two platters worth of festive treats to hand deliver to two other retailers in the Port City — Old Navy and Bath and Body Works — who had also faced unpleasant experiences with customers in recent weeks, according to Branch.

"We explained what we were doing, and we thought they could use a few retail hugs as well," Branch said.

"They were so happy and all the staff that were working in the stores that were in ear shot, they all came over, and they were all excited. We got lots of hugs and Thank yous."

The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce has also been spreading the gift of generosity this holiday season.

This month, the chamber of commerce collected personal care items for those in need and hand delivered them to 13 local charities and organizations, including the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Coverdale Centre for Women as part of its Bare Necessities campaign, which they first introduced in 2000.

"This year, we had 31 bankers' boxes and bags that we were able to fill to drop off to these 13 different charities ... we hand delivered the boxes as well, so it was nice to have that personal touch," said David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.

"We're very excited. Every year we get more and more product to donate and we collaborate with other associations as well."

Duplisea said the chamber typically receives smaller personal care items from their members, but this time around, they received an abundance of full size products from the community to distribute.

"The community has been great at supporting us in this endeavour," he said.

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