

Over the next few months, national and state economists will wrestle with pulling together an official analysis of the year 2009. But who needs to wait on the professionals to know there is good news to take into 2010.

First and foremost, despite economic hardships touching virtually everyone throughout 2009, people living in Marion County are extremely generous, caring and proud of the community they live in. People readily put aside their own worries and misfortune to reach out to those less fortunate.

A great example is how support for Marion County's Children and Families Department holiday book drive far exceeded expectations. The goal of 12,000 books in 12 days was easily reached. More than 32,000 books were donated.

The annual Shop with a Cop always proves to be a very personal and touching event. In addition to helping to brighten Christmas for children in need, the program also strives to build positive relationships between children and law enforcement officials. For almost 20 years, the all-volunteer Law Enforcement for Youth, a non-profit organization, raises approximately \$10,000 annually. This program pulls on the heartstrings of all involved and not surprisingly has a goal of expanding next year.

Businesses and organizations (too numerous to mention all by name) do a fantastic job with toy drives and clothing drives also making sure children in need can have a joyful Christmas.

Elderly and disabled residents at local nursing homes and care centers are not forgotten either as anonymous "Santas" fill their wish lists making certain everyone has a gift to open.

And then there is the Salvation Army and their Christmas Bell Ringers stationed at local retailers throughout the community accepting donations that keep their doors open and programs functioning for the needy.

Almost everywhere you turn local businesses, local fire departments, churches and youth groups of all sorts, collect food for local food banks to help ensure those less fortunate have food on their table for the holidays.

To keep our local A.W.A.R.E Food Bank shelves stocked, many businesses incorporate food collections into their year-round community giving activities. Making food donations in lieu of admission to events and shows has become popular.

And, I cannot forget to mention all who volunteered at churches and shelters around the county dishing up Thanksgiving meals and waiting tables for people they don't even

know. Many of these same generous volunteers stepped forward to sort and wrap Christmas gifts that will go to some of these same people who received the Thanksgiving meals!

What an expression of generosity, good will and community pride. It won't matter what the economists conclude for 2009, or predict for 2010, we are well on our way to a prosperous new year!

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