





**Sterling House**  
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Fiscal Year 2015-2016

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## *Fulfilling our 'Guiding Principles'*

It's been another eventful and successful fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, for Sterling House Community Center. Our agency programs have continued to positively impact the lives of thousands and thousands of youth, adults and senior citizens in Stratford and beyond.

As we prepare to mark our 85th anniversary in 2017, it is appropriate to look back to our founder, Cordelia Sterling, who in 1932 set Sterling House's guiding principles for future generations to follow. These principles were detailed in her will, in which she deeded Sterling House and its grounds - at 2283 Main Street - to the town of Stratford - with the condition "to serve the community."

In her Last Will and Testament she speaks of "embodying the spirit of Sterling House," imploring each of us who followed in the years and decades to come to not just be supporters, but to be ambassadors, to cultivate the work of Sterling House with our families, our friends, and our business acquaintances to ensure that this community center flourished for generations to come.

With Cordelia's last words setting the direction, Sterling House Community Center's "Mission" so many years later remains "to foster the physical, social, emotional, artistic and intellectual growth of our community."

So, all these years later, it is appropriate to ask ourselves, "Have we fulfilled her mandate?"

Contained within this Annual Report, we have listed the ways we have – and we speak with confidence on behalf of our Board, our Trustees, the Association and staff and say that, "Yes, Cordelia, we believe you would be pleased to see what we – all of us – have done to continue your legacy 'to spread good' throughout our community."

So to our donors, volunteers, civic, religious, town, state officials and residents of Stratford and beyond, we say, "thank you" again for your continuing support because we could not do this without you.

James Millward  
*Board Chairman*

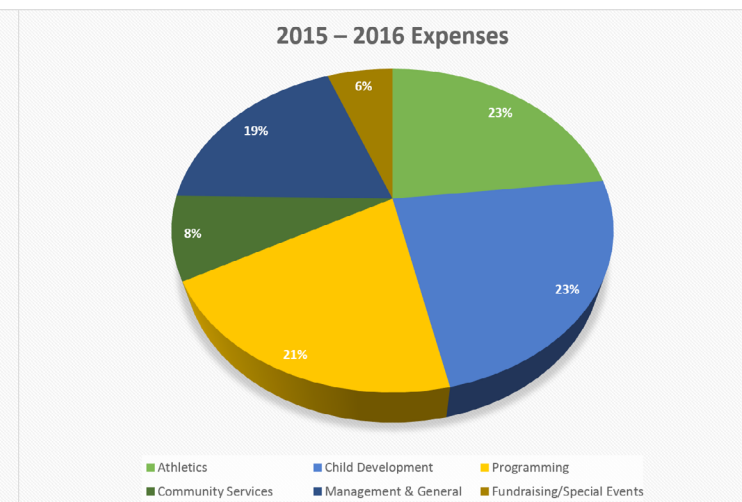
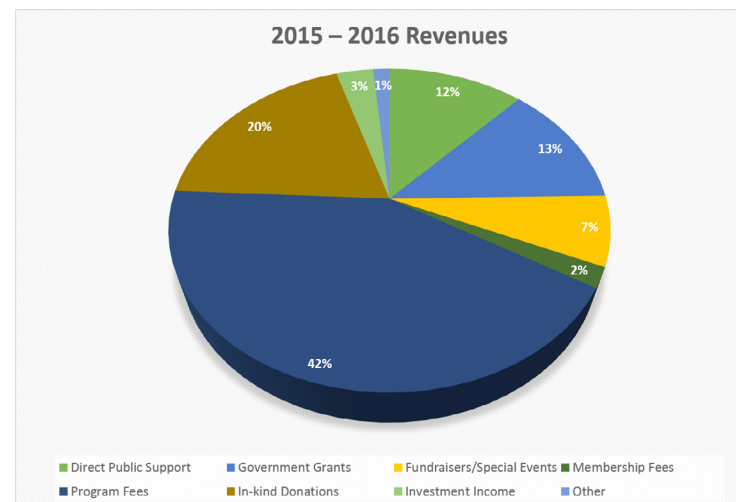
Amanda Meeson  
*Executive Director*

## *Financials*

Revenues	2015-2016	2014-2015
Direct Public Support	\$ 156,503	\$ 194,920
Government Grants	\$ 166,715	\$ 140,483*
Fundraisers/Special Events	\$ 91,115	\$ 108,671
Membership Fees	\$ 26,070	\$ 34,567
Program Fees	\$ 552,345	\$ 535,551
In-Kind Donations	\$ 254,913	\$ 323,604
Investment Income	\$ 42,822	\$ 52,137
Other	\$ 18,937	\$ 20,453

**Total** **\$1,309,420** **\$1,410,386**

\*In addition, we received \$400,000 in 14-15 as a deposit toward our renovation project/elevator installation.



Expenses	2015-2016	2014-2015
<b>Program Services:</b>		
Athletics	\$ 284,554	\$ 309,153
Child Development	\$ 287,748	\$ 329,877
Programming	\$ 251,106	\$ 301,828
Community Services	\$ 102,269	\$ 127,567
Management & General	\$ 232,374	\$ 206,583
Fundraising/Special Events	\$ 71,047	\$ 53,494

**Total** **\$1,229,098** **\$1,328,502**

**Depreciation** **\$ 15,337** **\$ 11,484**

**Increase (Decrease) Net Assets** **\$ 64,985** **\$ 70,400**







# Summer Camp celebrates 75th anniversary in 2016

The Summer Day Camp at Sterling House marked its 75th anniversary in June, July and August of 2016 as more than 250 youths took part in the program that features swimming pool, arts & crafts, field activities, penny carnival, touch-a-truck, jungle jamboree, field trips, on-site playground, and more.

The summer program also offers extended AM and PM hours to aid working parents who need that coverage.

The summer camp program has changed in these seven decades. But the satisfaction it provides to the youngsters and counselors who attend as well as parents remains the same. Some comments from 2016 camp:

"My son liked many things: store, pool, trips, special activities and the playground."

"They keep safe kids; make fun for them."

"My son likes Erin's Gym the most and enjoys the camp store and the little 'extras' like Rita's ice and field trips."

"The Bounce U field trip was the best trip of the summer."

"The people create a wonderfully positive, safe and encouraging environment conducive to having a great summer! Thank you!"

"The camp is a highly recommended camp. I went to this camp when I was younger and now my son attended for the first time. He didn't want it to end."

Meanwhile, counselors-in-training (CITs) had comments too, including:

"It was a good experience that will help me in the future."

"It felt good to help younger kids have fun."

"Camp helped me make new friendships."

"It helped me learn something about myself."

A special thank you to the Fairfield County Community Foundation for providing a grant for our C.I.T. Program.

Call our front office at (203) 378-2606 for more camp information.



# Introducing our new executive director, Amanda Meeson

Sterling House Community Center announces the appointment of Amanda Meeson as executive director. Meeson comes to Sterling House from The Leadership Program, a community based organization based in New York, where she served as vice president of programming.

Meeson graduated cum laude from Ithaca College with a bachelor of arts in theatre.

Meeson has been a Stratford resident for eight years and lives here with her husband and two young children Reggie (4) and Quincy (1). She is passionate about the power of community and is grateful for the opportunity to usher in the next evolution of change at an organization with such a rich history.

"The Board of Directors of Sterling House is truly excited to have Amanda Meeson take the reins as the third executive director in our 84-year history, and we welcome her to her new role. We could not be happier to have her join us, and we all look forward to the direction that Sterling House will head in the years to come," said James Millward, chairman of the Sterling House Board of Directors.



## Send us your favorite Sterling House memory

Are you an alumni of Sterling House Community Center? Do you remember coming to Summer Camp in your youth? Did you play in a Sterling House sponsored athletics league? Or take music lessons, art classes, cooking or participate in any number of the various clubs and activities that the agency has sponsored and hosted through the years?

We want to hear from you!

Sterling House is celebrating its 85th anniversary in 2017 and has planned a series of special events to commemorate the occasion.

In addition, the agency is asking the general public to submit a "Favorite Memory or Story of Sterling House" as part of the anniversary celebration.

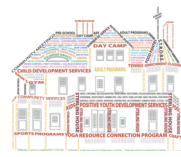
Send us your favorite Sterling House memory to: Sterling House Memories, 2283 Main St., Stratford, CT 06615.



Sterling House staff and Board of Directors at the 2016 Gala







*Sterling House*  
COMMUNITY CENTER

# *Sterling House renovation to improve access, increase opportunities to add new programs*

## Summer 2017 completion expected

In December 2016, a \$2.4 million state-funded renovation project began at Sterling House Community Center that will facilitate client access, make-over the lobby and front office to be more user-friendly, renovate and improve access to the food pantry in the basement of the historic agency home at 2283 Main Street, and expand first floor office space.

The project, which will not affect the home's historic status, is expected to be completed this summer, and it will coincide with the 85th anniversary of the agency that was founded in 1932. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on February 21, 2017.

The renovation also includes a four-stop elevator, code compliance work, and heating and cooling plant improvements that will improve efficiencies and help the agency save energy dollars.

The project has been a long time coming, according to Sterling House Board of Directors Chairman James Millward. Stratford's state legislative delegation, which in 2014 included Rep. Laura Hoydick (R-120), Rep. Larry Miller (R-122), Sen. Kevin Kelly (R-21), Sen. Andres Ayala, Jr. (D-23), and the late Rep. Terry Backer (D-121) advocated for the first round of bond funding, which was approved in March 2014. At that time, Connecticut Gov. Dannel P. Malloy said, "We are investing in Sterling House because we want to ensure this cultural landmark is used as much in the future as it has been for the last 80+ years," adding, "Sterling House offers quality social, educational and recreational programming that has enriched the lives of people of all ages and this project will allow them to continue serving this community for generations to come."

The second round of bond funding was announced in July 2016 through the efforts of the local delegation that then included State Rep. Ben McGorty (R-122), State Rep. Joe Gresko (D-121) and State Sen. Ed Gomes (D-23), along with Rep. Hoydick and Sen. Kelly. Rep. Hoydick, a former Sterling House Board member and also a co-founding member of the agency's Sterling Classic golf tournament committee, said, "This project is essential to Sterling House being able to effectively continue to carry out its mission. Physically challenged populations are currently unable to access the Resource Connection program or the Food Pantry, and children have literally been carried to the 2nd and 3rd floors for activities."

Sen. Kelly and Rep. Miller noted those who have physical limitations will be able to access classes, workshops, support groups and other programs with greater ease. Rep. McGorty cited the elevator addition "as very important to operational capabilities," while Rep. Gresko praised funding for "facilitating access and safety at the center," and Sen. Gomes noted that "even more people can access the important services provided for people of all ages with this funding."

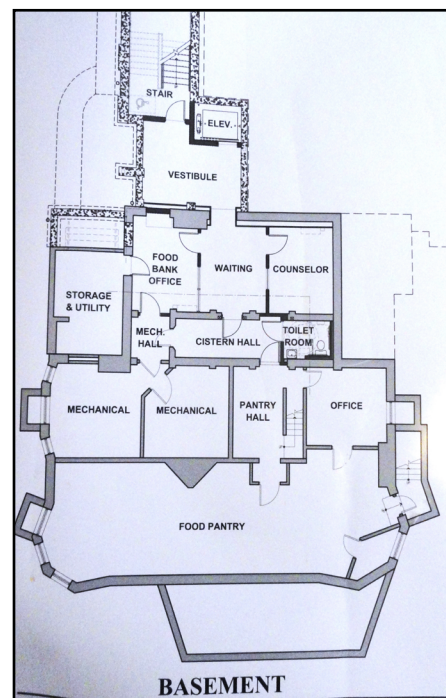
Executive Director Amanda Meeson and Board members are thrilled at the prospect of making the entire building accessible to all, including seniors and disabled. "With the improved access, we can offer new and innovative programming activities on every floor," Meeson said, which is currently underutilized due to limited access.

Separately, she noted, the agency is hoping also to renovate the third floor, upgrade the agency's aging kitchen facilities on the first floor that serve the preschool program and rentals to third parties users, as well as add refrigeration and freezer capacity to the food pantry from additional grants, improving fresh food options for the families we serve.

A public grand opening celebration in conjunction with the agency's 85th anniversary will occur the weekend of September 15-18, dubbed "Sterling House Weekend."



Top picture, architect's drawing of new elevator and entrance from south side of building. Middle picture, Sterling House as it's seen from Main Street, and, below, schematic drawing of basement pantry renovation plan.



*Sterling House*  
COMMUNITY CENTER

# *Youth Supporting Sterling House*

*Sterling House relies on the generosity of the community to help fund its programs.  
And each year we receive donations from some surprisingly youthful sources.*

## Acer foregoes birthday gifts for pantry

Perhaps Sterling House's youngest donor of late is little Acer Mauris, who just turned 4-years-old in December 2016, and who joined his Mom and Dad, Kate and Jonathan Maurais, and his aunt, as a Sterling House donor this past holiday season.



Kate Maurais explained, "Since Acer was very little we have made donations at Thanksgiving and Christmas time at our church. This year we decided to expand on it, and with his birthday being so close to Christmas, we thought that is was the perfect time to do so.

"We asked that guests to Acer's birthday party this year bring non-perishable foods in lieu of gifts." And after the party was over, "Acer was excited to count and deliver the donations" to Sterling House.

Acer delivered the donations two days before Christmas with his Aunt Jessie, Kate said, "and we are continuing to encourage kindness and having him involved with the process by having him shop, scan, and deliver additional donations."

Indeed, in February 2017, "Acer has chosen to donate animal food to the Sterling House Food Pantry," his mom reported, adding, "Thank you to Sterling House for all you do in our community."



## Youths donate kids bicycles at the holidays

Another example of youth giving to Sterling House is the story of two Fairfield girls who donated youth bicycles for four straight holiday seasons through agency fiscal year 2015-2016. This mini-tradition began in 2012 when the family of Sofia Tedesco purchased a bike for a cousin who lived in Texas who was supposed to visit the family in Connecticut. However, when the family relation could not make the trip up north, Sofia and her friend, Olivia Geckler, picked Sterling House as the good place for the bike to go. The bike found a good home in Stratford as part of annual Holiday Toy Drive that year, and it was then

that the girls, both 10-years-old in 2012, decided to donate bicycles the following year.

Fast-forward to the 2015-2016 agency fiscal year to when the two girls, now 13-years-old, observed their 4th holiday season of giving to Sterling House, delivering four bikes that went to two local families. At the time, the girls told a local daily newspaper that it made them feel good that they were able "make other kids feel good during the holiday."

Thank you, Sofia and Olivia, pictured at left.



Stratford schools, public and private, support Sterling House regularly. Recently, Second Hill Elementary School held a Spirit Day where students and staff raised \$226 for the Food Pantry. To all our student and school donors throughout the town and region, we say, "Thank you!" Pictured, above, STROBE volunteers decorate Thanksgiving food bags.

## Town teenager, 15, donates \$300

Stratford resident Jesse Veilleux was 15-years-old in August 2016 when he decided to donate \$300 to Sterling House. While it is not all that unusual for teens to make modest cash contributions or to help a family member, school, civic or church group deliver food donations to our Food Pantry, a cash donation of that amount is fairly rare.

When asked afterward what motivated him to make the donation, Jesse said the inspiration came from his mother. "I was looking for an opportunity to give back to the community and my Mom suggested Sterling House," he said. "When I was little, I came to summer camp at Sterling House. The staff and everyone were nice and I enjoyed it."

Sterling House seemed like a great fit, he said.

When asked how he earned the money, Jesse, a former Wooster Middle School student and a junior at St. Joseph's High School at the time of his interview, said he shoveled snow among other things.

While it was still a little early on his future college plans, Jesse is looking at several colleges and is leaning toward engineering. But no matter where Jesse ends up attending and what he studies, everyone at Sterling House wishes him the best of luck and thanks him for supporting our work.







# *Sterling House Athletic Programs serve 2,400+ annually*



It is well known that physical exercise and team sports are good for the body, mind and spirit, and for decades Sterling House Community Center has been leading the way with its youth and adult athletics programs in Stratford. In the agency's 2015-2016 fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, participation remained high at all levels, with vital contributions from our coaches and referees, who together made Sterling House athletics a model program, including:

**Soccer Fall 2015** – In all, 389 boys played on 23 teams in six age divisions with 48 coaches. Also, 294 girls played on 20 teams in five age divisions guided by 38 coaches. Many thanks to our 34 team sponsors! For our younger players in the 2015 Fall instructional soccer league for 4 & 5 years olds: 56 youngsters took part in three sessions with two paid coaches.

**Lacrosse Fall 2015** – A new program, "Introduction to Lacrosse", had 48 boys and girls with more than 10 volunteer coaches. Meanwhile, Fall girls Lacrosse had 25 senior league (7th/8th graders) girls participating with Coach Drew Viner.

**Adult Flag Football Fall 2015** – The program had 14 teams that played every Sunday morning from September thru November on the Penders turf field.



**Instructional Basketball 2015** – A program for 5- to 7-year-olds held in November and December 2015 that had 32 boys & girls with two paid coaches. The son of former UConn star player Chris Smith was a participant.

**Instructional Basketball 2016** – A program for 5- to 7-year-olds held in January & February that had 26 boys & girls with two paid coaches.

**Youth Basketball 2015-2016** – The very popular program had 357 boys on 37 teams in six age groups with 51 coaches & 18 team sponsors.

**High School Basketball League 2015-2016** – The league featured 162 players on eight Junior Varsity teams (9th & 10th grade boys) plus nine Varsity (11th & 12th boys) level teams with 30 coaches – the most teams in the 20-year history of the league.

**Lacrosse Spring 2016** – Had 86 boys and 74 girls participating.

**Soccer Spring 2016** – Featured 339 boys on 25 teams in five age groups plus 42 coaches. For the girls, 306 girls played on 20 teams in four age divisions guided by 33 coaches. Many thanks to our 19 team sponsors. Soccer Notes: This past Spring we had 52 youth referees who received modest pay for their services, all of whom attended a mandatory two-hour clinic & meeting in order to qualify.

**Instructional Soccer Spring 2016** – For 4- & 5-year-olds, we had 34 boys & girls in two sessions on Saturdays including two paid coaches. Monday instructional soccer had 20 boys and girls with one paid teen coach working with Head Coach Ritty MacDaniel who volunteered his services.



# *Sterling House Preschool*

## **New five-year accreditation gained**

We are proud of the Board, management and Sterling House Community Center's preschool program staff for its recent program Accreditation for five years through August 1, 2021, by the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC).

The February 4, 2016, NAEYC notification letter stated, "The administration, teaching staff and families of Sterling House Preschool are to be congratulated for continuing to uphold the mark of quality represented by NAEYC Accreditation."



Program quality was evident in the report scores attained by Sterling House Preschool, with eight of 10 measures achieving 100% scores including Relationships, Teaching,

Assessments, Health and Families, and no rating scored lower than 93%.

Commendations included kudos for "your program promoting positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community." Also, the report "commends your program for using developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development."

Sterling House Preschool was also positively cited "for promoting the nutrition and health of children and protecting children and staff from illness and injury."  
**A GREAT JOB BY ALL!**

## **Children learn in classroom, but also by engaging in the community.**



For agency fiscal year 2015-2016, Child Development and Preschool Director Priscilla Choquette reported, "We had a school year full of adventure and learning. We had visits from musicians, fire fighters, dentists, exercise programs, the Audubon," and much more.

"We went to the Baldwin Center for a Costume Parade in October and to sing carols in December 2015. We also took a walk down Main Street to pick out our pumpkin from the Pumpkin Patch on the Stratford United Methodist Church lawn.

"We loved raking the fall leaves and jumping into the piles and we loved hatching caterpillars into butterflies that we released in the spring. We made roasted pumpkin seeds, applesauce, cookies, Stone Soup, fruit salad and more!"

Total preschool census for the full year was 23 children served, with 12 moving on to Kindergarten in the Fall of 2016.







# The Sterling House Food Pantry



Photo above: St. Mark's School students help unload a car trunk filled with food. Below, the Resource Connection Food Pantry.



Below left: Stratford Rotary members deliver turkeys. Below right: thank you to Jim Casey at Stratford Development for donating his building for toy sorting, and to the Stratford's Junior Woman's League for its tremendous support.



The Sterling House Resource Connection / Food Pantry in 2015-2016 again served many thousands of individuals in Stratford, Bridgeport and surrounding communities. The Food Pantry is part of the Sterling House Resource Connection program, which is a comprehensive, basic needs assistance program providing food, diapers, pet food, school supplies, Thanksgiving food baskets, holiday gifts, personal care items, and information and referral to families in Stratford and the greater Bridgeport area. In fiscal year 2015-2016, Sterling House:

- Served 7,371 individuals with food assistance
- Distributed 59,560 pounds of food including several hundred turkeys and food baskets for Thanksgiving
- Provided enough food to prepare 49,633 meals
- Distributed 300 backpacks/school supplies to local students
- Distributed thousands of dollars of pet food
- Distributed close to 1,000 toys for children at the holidays

Many thanks to our volunteers and to everyone in the greater Stratford community who supports our Resource Connection programs including: Sikorsky Federal Credit Union; Hawley Lane Target; Big Y of Stratford; Encon; Rivers Edge Café, Stratford Stop & Shop; the Connecticut Food Bank, the Hunger Outreach Network of Coastal Churches; the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County; People's United Bank Foundation; TD Bank Foundation; Town of Stratford; the Inner City Foundation for Charity and Education; Wal-Mart Foundation; ShopRite of Stratford; the Ernest & Joan Trefz Foundation; the Helen Breznicky Charitable Trust; Amerprise Foundation, and so many more. Many thanks to everyone!



# A Christmas Tree story: Sterling House, December 2016

A special donor who wished to remain anonymous provided the staff at Sterling House Community Center "a very special 10 minutes of Christmas" cheer and goodwill in mid-December 2016.

Each year Sterling House Community Center conducts a Christmas tree sales fundraiser led by a very special volunteer, Anne Wargo, who is ably assisted by many others volunteers, including her husband, Bob.

As many in the community know, hundreds of Christmas trees are purchased wholesale each year by the Main Street based agency that among other programs runs a preschool, food pantry, summer day camp and a very active year-round athletics program.

This year, based on past year's results, the agency purchased more than 400 trees and began its sales Thanksgiving week, according to Executive Director Amanda Meeson. Tree sales were consistent and on par with year's past, Wargo noted, for the first three weeks.

Fast-forward to Thursday, Dec. 15, when Sterling House had about 40 trees remaining with a forecast for rain and snow for the coming weekend. It was mid-afternoon when a local woman along with her daughter came to the front office and asked how many trees were remaining. She had seen Sterling House's Facebook page where the agency had been promoting its Christmas tree sales.

According to Donna Kelly, front office manager, the woman then pulled out an envelope and said, "I think I have about enough money to buy them all," and proceeded to hand Kelly \$2,000 in \$100 bills. Her instructions were to give them all away "to families who need them."

Shocked by the generosity and kindness, Kelly burst out in tears, and proceeded to thank the donor, who did not leave her name nor wish to be formally acknowledged, and Kelly then spread the news to agency staff, who were also awestruck by this person's generosity.

But the story doesn't end there.

Sterling House is currently undergoing a major construction project to install a four-stop elevator to better serve its clients and members, and especially those utilizing the agency's Food Pantry, which annually helps feed more than 7,500 area residents. Also part of the renovation will be a new front office, lobby and reception area.

Just moments prior to what staff now calls the "Christmas Tree Angel" appearing, the elevator construction crew at Sterling House's site at 2283 Main Street cut through the electrical supply line to the agency's garage, which housed among many other items all the necessary items for the tree sales: including wreaths, tie strings, chainsaw, other supplies, etc...



The agency would have no way to open the electric garage door nor proper outdoor lighting to conduct its tree sales, at least for the moment.

But putting aside for the moment the garage access and outdoor lighting inconvenience, according to Meeson, about 10 minutes after all the trees were purchased and instructed to be donated at the agency's discretion, a local mother of three children appeared at the front desk inquiring about a Christmas tree.

Well, when Kelly told the mother that she was in luck in that Sterling House was now giving away all its remaining trees, the tears began flowing again, this time with Meeson joining the two in a teary group embrace.

Facial tissues were liberally distributed.



STUDENT VOLUNTEERS AT 2016 CHRISTMAS TREE SALES

The mother told Kelly and Meeson that she really didn't think she could afford a tree, but that her children continued to ask, telling her, "it's not Christmas without a tree." Needless to say, this household now has a tree courtesy of "The Christmas Tree Angel."

And there's more, as it rained and snowed all the following weekend, Sat. and Sun. Dec. 17-18, which would have made the last weekend of sales difficult if not downright unhealthy for all involved.

Instead, on Saturday, Dec. 17, as Stratford EMS assisted Sterling House in making its annual holiday toy deliveries to families as part of its holiday toy drive directed by another super volunteer, Sue Kostopoulos, EMS staff distributed free Christmas trees vouchers to those families who still needed a tree.

The remaining trees were all distributed to these families this past week, prompting Meeson to recall, "It was a powerful 10 minutes at Sterling House that clearly represents the spirit of giving and just how far one gift can go."

