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Southern Illinois Jeep Association to provide holiday aid
 Kevin Darr
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The words Jeep and charity don't often sit side by side in the same sentence, but two area woman are working to make the words synonymous.

Karen Kirk and Carolyn Sickmeier are members of the Southern Illinois Jeep Association, founded by Kirk's husband, Robert. While, as the name implies, the main focus of the group is for Jeep lovers to unite, they have a much larger focus.

For the second year in a row, Kirk and Sickmeier have decided to adopt local families in need and provide them with food, clothing and the necessities they need to get through this holiday season.

"We started the Adopt-A-Family program last year by adopting five local families and accepting donations to help them out," Kirk said. "We just felt that we needed to help those less fortunate than us but we get something out of this as well."

The non-profit organization gives all the money and donations to the families which are raised through bake sales, chili cook-offs and barbecues.

"We started the charity because we wanted to know where all the proceeds were going instead of giving donations to someone else who could do whatever they wanted," Sickmeier said. "We just hope that we can get some more community support behind us and get more families help next year."

There is a reason the name of the organization has Jeep in it though. For starters, ownership of a Jeep is a requirement to join. The group advocates environmental protection, keeping trails open in area national forests and follows Tread Lightly rules, a series of rules emphasizing the responsible use of vehicles on the environment.

"This organization was formed with family values in mind and having a good time in nature," Sickmeier said. "We respect the environment and try to follow every rule to help preserve the natural state of things."

Currently SIJA is selling raffle tickets for a Warn 8,000 lb. winch and accessory kit. Winners will be announced at the SIJA 2003 Christmas Party at 7 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Millstadt Veterans of Foreign War, 200 Veterans Drive.

To join SIJA, log on to the Web site at sija.org or call Robert Kirk at 281-7851.



Mark Fedmann photo

Southern Illinois Jeep Association members, from left, Doug Guilliams, secretary; Carolyn Sickmeier, treasurer; Karen Kirk, member; and Robert Kirk, president, prepare to deliver gifts to needy families.

Families benefit from the generosity of jeep enthusiasts

By Lauren Bailie
Staff writer

Five members of the **MONROE COUNTY** Southern Illinois Jeep Association used their off-road machines Sunday afternoon to deliver food and presents to five needy families in the area.

"It was overwhelming," said Robert Kirk of Columbia, current president and one of the chapter's founders. "Not one of the families we delivered to wasn't in dire need."

Kirk said he is determined to include charitable services in his newly formed club's activities.

"We want to contribute to the community," Kirk said.

Throughout its first year the association has collected canned goods and members have donated an additional \$1,200.

"It's turned out really nice," Kirk said. "I was thoroughly surprised."

Kirk didn't want to just send a

check to an organization and not know where it was distributed.

"We wanted to find an organization where we could be one on one with the families and not get lost in the shuffle," he said.

Kirk had local help to locate the five families in Christopher, O'Fallon, Belleville and Columbia.

"Families not only received food baskets, but presents too," Kirk said.

Kirk's wife, Karen, said she was deeply touched by the families' response.

"At one of the homes a 3-year-old girl jumped up and down when she saw us," Karen Kirk said. "It was something else."

The association has its meetings outside of Waterloo, but cover most of Southern Illinois and parts of Missouri.

"The response from the public has been really great," Kirk said. "It was definitely a success and we will do it again next year."

If anyone is interested in helping out or donating goods for next year, contact the Kirks at 281-7851.