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CATHIE COWARD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Neighbours on Avondale Street are doing their bit to support Hamilton Food Share — and, with all those lights, they're helping hydro, too.

Avondale is all strung out

Homeowners get together to light up the lives of the hungry

BY DANIELLE WONG

Be prepared to pull over if you're driving down Avondale Street with kids in the car.

Neighbours on the Stoney Creek street are decking out their homes with bright Christmas lights, large inflatable decorations and illuminated Santa Claus displays to raise funds and collect food for Hamilton Food Share.

The organizers are stopping drivers and offering them hot chocolate, candy canes and cookies, and asking them for donations and non-perishable food items.

Although the dozen or so participating households have decorated their homes and purchased refreshments at their own expense, everything raised will go to the

food bank.

Jen Van Oosten, 32, one of the organizers, said she spent about \$1,000 on inflatable decorations.

She says parents have had to stop their cars because the elaborately decorated street has caught their children's eye.

"They say 'We had to turn around and come back. Our kids were freaking out!'"

Since they started the Street of Lights campaign at the beginning of the month, the neighbours have collected more than 450 food items worth about \$1,500 and about \$500 in cash donations, Van Oosten said Saturday night as she stood in front of a row of festively-lit houses.

They are collecting donated food items until Dec. 20, but are col-

lecting cash donations and leaving the lights up until New Year's.

Another organizer, Tracy Wilson, said it becomes especially important to do something as a community when people they know have lost their jobs recently.

"I work in a grocery store and watch people count their pennies just to buy a loaf of bread," she said.

"You know what kind of money they had before they lost their jobs and now you find out that they're losing jobs.

"It kind of hits home when it's a friend, family. So that's exactly what this is about.

"It's not just to help the homeless. There are people that are homeless and need food, and people with homes that need food."

Carol Dunbar, who lives nearby,

said Avondale Street is a good example for other neighbourhoods in Hamilton.

"More streets need to do this ... it's a community thing," she said. "Let's get the community to get together and have some fun," she said.

Wilson agreed, adding the event has brought them together. "We fight like brothers and sister but by the end of the day we all help each other," she said.

The Avondale residents hope to continue the Street of Lights tradition in future years, especially after the warm reception it has received this month, Van Oosten said.

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