

# PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Katie Reilly / (315) 601-0923 / kreilly@newyorksash.com

## Community Comes Together with Toys for Teens Fund

(Utica, NY) – A new initiative in Utica area holiday drives, the Toys for Teens Fund, has turned out to be successful in raising \$2,821 for older youth in the community thanks to partners The Catalyst Group, Made in Utica, The Uticast and GreenScapes Garden Center and Landscape Co.

The idea for Toys for Teens came from New York Sash Director of Marketing Katie Reilly. It developed out of an Observer-Dispatch Operation Sunshine planning meeting and conversation with local Marine Corps' Toys for Tots members.

“You probably could guess that Utica does really well with donating to families in need for the holidays. Unfortunately, it turns out there's a severe gap in donations for low-income pre- and young teenagers,” said Reilly. These kids aged nine and up often get overlooked with traditional toy drive donations, a problem that was very disheartening for her to hear. Reilly decided to take on this challenge.

After speaking with Jim Ransom of Toys for Tots, Reilly decided to set up the Toys for Teens Fund. The money raised through these efforts could be earmarked directly towards buying gifts for kids in the specific age group. The fundraising efforts brought in a total of \$2,821.

Reilly initially planned a holiday party with the Catalyst Group of the Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce. The young professionals group hosted the *Jingle Jam Fundraiser*, held December 3<sup>rd</sup> at The DEV in Utica. The event raised \$2,050 from attendance and raffles.

Community group Made in Utica also came on board to support this holiday initiative. Group co-founder Justin Parkinson donated \$5 of every sale from their *Homebrewed for the Holiday* Gift Boxes directly to the Toys for Teens Fund for a total of \$250. These Gift Boxes featured items that made and produced right in Utica.

Local up-and-coming podcast, The Uticast, held an online “Operation Uticast” drive which brought in \$301.

And last but not least was the *Holly Jolly Fun'raiser* through GreenScapes Garden Center & Landscape Co. The company raised \$220.

“It is so important to give back to the community this time of year if you are able to do so. The groups I worked with are all lead by amazing people who are devoted to this city and the people in it,” Reilly said.

Reilly thanks Operation Sunshine and Toys for Tots for backing the Toys for Teens Fund idea. They brought together partners New York Sash, WIBX, WUTR, Utica Mack and Time Warner Cable for the 2015 efforts. For more information and ways to help, visit [opsun.org](http://opsun.org).

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