

South Carolina Sheriff receives Salvation Army bell-ringer commendation award

Sheriff Leon Lott accepts award on behalf of the men and women of the Richland County (S.C.) Sheriff's Department

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(S.C.) Sheriff Leon Lott received the Salvation Army Bell-ringer Commendation Award during ceremonies kicking-off the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign for the 2023 season. The ceremony which included remarks from Salvation Army officials and Christmas carols sung by the Columbia International University Choir was held on the north steps of the S.C. State House in Columbia, Monday, Nov. 20.

"Each year, the Salvation Army of the Midlands chooses an organization that has gone above and beyond the call of duty in ringing the Christmas bells at all of our red kettles," said Major Mark Craddock, area (five-county region) commander of The Salvation Army. "The Richland County Sheriff's Department for two years in a row holds the record for the most number of dollars placed in a Salvation Army red Christmas kettle."

On Dec. 8, 2022, uniformed deputies – primarily members of the Richland County Sheriff's Department's (RCSD) command staff and Community Action Team – manned two doors at



Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott honored by Maj. Mark Craddock, Salvation Army of the Midlands, S.C.



The Columbia International University Choir with RCSD Deputy Chief Maria Yturria and Sheriff Leon Lott at the S.C. State House in Columbia, Nov. 20, 2023.

Walmart on Two Notch Road in northeast Columbia, ringing the bells from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with Sheriff Lott himself ringing the bell and welcoming shoppers in the late afternoon.

The amount raised that day by RCSD was \$2,349. The previous year's record set by RCSD was \$1,473. RCSD broke its 2021 record by \$876, and Salvation Army officials say any single-day kettle amount over \$500 is considered a "very good" day.

RCSD will ring the bells again this year at the same Walmart location on Dec. 7.

Receiving the bell-ringer commendation award, Lott said: "I accept this on behalf of all the men and women of the Richland County Sheriff's Department. We do this for love of the Salvation Army, what they stand for, what they provide in this community, and the hope they provide for the people in need."

Lott added: "Being a bell-ringer is fun. If you've never done it, you're missing out on one of life's unique opportunities. You smile. You meet people. And you witness the joy that people experience when they put that money in the kettle. You see how people in this community care about one another and about this mission, and you're sending a message that you care."

In addition to Craddock and Lott, remarks were delivered by Elliott Powell, chair of the Salvation Army of the Midlands' advisory board, and J.T. and Mary Gandolfo of J.T.'s KIA. The Gandolfo family then presented a check for \$150,000 to the Salvation Army for their kick-off to the 2023 campaign.

"Every dollar collected will fuel critical services for individuals and families in need right here in the Midlands," said Craddock.

The five counties served by the Salvation Army of the Midlands, include Richland, Lexington, Kershaw, Newberry, and Fairfield Counties.

Since 1905, community partners in the Midlands like RCSD have helped ring the bell to raise awareness and funds for The Salvation Army. One of many programs supported by Midlands-area kettle funds is the Christmas Angel Tree program, providing children with new toys and clothing. Kettle funds also support the Salvation Army's social services department which provides for housing stability (preventing homelessness), meals served and food service for homeless shelters, as well as youth development, including summer camps and reading programs.

Headquartered in London, England, the Salvation Army is an international Christian organization founded in 1865 as the East London Christian Mission by William and Catherine Booth. Today there are more than 1.7-million members of the Salvation Army worldwide and the organization is said to be the largest non-government provider of social services in the North America.

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