

Community reflects: Jewish and Muslim day of service

By DJ Barger

While many families spent the Christmas holiday together indoors, some metro area residents used the day as an opportunity for community service.

On Dec. 25, over 600 members of local Jewish and Muslim community groups participated in the Jewish and Muslim Day of Service.

The Jewish and Muslim Day of Service involved several types of service and was open to participants of any (or no) religious affiliation.

This year, helpers from over 20 organizations volunteered at 21 different service sites.

The activities included visiting children in hospitals, visiting elderly community members in nursing homes, taking food to fire stations and making items to donate later such as gift baskets.

Local synagogues, mosques, stores and businesses provided donations to support the numerous collection drives that were held to prepare for the event.

Gail Wechsler is a staff member at the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), one of the organizations that sponsored the event.

She was a co-chair for the day of service along with Zubaida Ibrahim, member of the Islamic Foundation of Greater Saint Louis (IFGSTL).

“We had a welcome breakfast for those that could attend in the morning. Then we went to the service sites. Most took about two to three hours. Most of the events were in the morning, but a few were in the afternoon,” Wechsler said.

Thanks to volunteers, efforts were wide-reaching throughout St. Louis. The JCRC reported that 48 dog collars were made for Saint Louis Effort for AIDS, 600 soup mix packets and 90 bags of food were packed for food pantries, 120 gift bags were made for those in need, 290 meals were delivered, 750 toiletry packets were made for the Ronald McDonald House and 70 dozen cookies were delivered to police officers and firemen.

Bryan Sokol, from the Center for Service and Community Engagement at SLU highlighted the connection between faith and community service.

“This day really exemplifies the role that faith has in building communities and connecting across differences to serve the common good,” Sokol said. “I took my entire family [to the day of service] last year, and was very pleased to see other families there trying to instill a sense of community and service in children. I am also excited by how much this event has grown since last year!”

As part of the Interfaith Challenge at SLU, the Center for Service and Community Engagement helped promote the Jewish and Muslim Day of service. Wechsler hopes that the event will gain even more participants next year and increase its community impact.