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By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

On Dec. 13, local and area residents are invited to get in the holiday spirit of giving and enjoy great food served by local celebrities and entertainment and fun for the whole family.

The fourth annual Red Stocking Breakfast to benefit the Kansas Children's Service League is open to the public and will take place from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 13, at the Liberal Country Club.

All proceeds benefit KCSL's Southwest Kansas Head Start and Early Head Start programs serving more than 500 low-income children and their families each year.

"For many people, Red Stocking Breakfast is a fun event to attend with family and friends during the Holidays," said Lisa Knoll, development manager for KCSL. "What many don't realize is the impact sponsorships, tickets sales and other contributions have on KCSL's ability to meet the needs of children and families throughout the year."

The availability of Head Start and Early Head Start in Western Kansas, as well as other KCSL prevention and education services in the Kansas City, Kan., Topeka and Wichita areas are made possible thanks to Red Stocking Breakfast funds.

While many of these programs are federally or state funded, and some receive additional support from United Ways and other grant sources, all rely on the Red Stocking Breakfast funds to fully serve their area.

For instance, the federal funding KCSL Head Start receives is approximately 75 percent of the funding required for the program, but KCSL is required to raise a 25 percent local match which can be in cash or services, illustrating community support for the program. Red Stocking Breakfast funding falls into the category for the local match.

“In Southwest Kansas, we have one in Garden City, and then we have the event in Liberal,” said Jessica Mahler, marketing and public relations specialist for KCSL. “Both of those events go to benefit Early Head Start and Head Start in both of those communities. Both of those programs receive state and federal funds. I’m not for sure if they receive any United Way funds.”

Mahler said both of these programs require support from the community, and they in turn want some of the funds to be raised by the community to show the support for the programs.

“That’s kind of where these Red Stocking Breakfasts events come into play. It’s an opportunity for us to raise money for those programs and show the community support for those programs and in order to keep those programs operating,” she said.

Mahler said last year’s breakfast served more than 200 people and raised more than \$13,500 locally.

Knoll said the Liberal breakfast is primarily to support the Head Start program.

“We serve 86 children and families there through Head Start,” she said. “We also have a grandparents support group that’s started in Liberal. The money that’s raised from the Liberal Red Stocking Breakfast goes to support mainly the Liberal Head Start program, but we also provide Head Start in the surrounding counties like Haskell County, Grant County, Stevens County.”

Knoll said the Head Start program serves 13 counties in the area.

“All of the money that we raise due to Red Stocking Breakfast in Garden City and Liberal stays right here in Southwest Kansas,” she said.

Knoll said this year's goal for fund-raising is \$15,000, the same goal KCSL officials set for last year's breakfast.

"We were very close to it last year," she said. "I think we made it last year."

Head Start provides center and home-based services that include intensive preschool services, parent education and support and goal setting and tracking to help the family achieve self sufficiency.

Through the program, KCSL staff regularly visit families in their home to teach parents about healthy child development, help them access immunizations and other health care and assist parents with utilizing community services.

Head Start and Early Head Start are designed to help keep children safe and families strong, according to Robena Farrell, West Region Director for KCSL.

"By helping families early, before problems arise, we increase the likelihood that at-risk children are raised in a safe and supportive home – which numerous studies show decreases the probability for negative childhood outcomes such as truancy, substance abuse, and foster care," she said.

A holiday tradition

The Red Stocking Breakfast is a continuance of a tradition of holiday giving to the Kansas Children's Service League that started more than 80 years ago.

In the 1920s, the community was invited to make holiday gifts to children living at KCSL's receiving home, a temporary residence for children awaiting a foster or adoptive home.

These children would hang their "Little Red Stockings" in anticipation of the generosity of the community. KCSL will also host Red Stocking Breakfast events in Garden City, Overland Park, Topeka and Wichita in 2008.

The event features a buffet breakfast served by local celebrities, and everyone's seasonal favorite, Santa Claus, will be stopping by for a visit and photos with children young and young at heart.

Local celebrity servers include Seward County Community College President Dr. Duane Dunn, city and county commissioners, Jana Jantzen from First National Bank, SCCC's Celeste Donovan, MacArthur Principal Shawna Evans, Liberal Fire Chief Kelly Kirk, USD 480 board member Cheryl Louderback, Enrique Franz from Rocking M Radio, former mayor Jack Cooley, USD 480 Superintendent Vernon Welch and Michelle Gillespie from Southwest Medical Center.

"I'm sure we're going to have others," Knoll said. "We do still need celebrity servers, so if anybody got their celebrity server letter and they haven't signed up, they can still contact us to serve."

Knoll said there will also be a drawing for a package of a round trip from Liberal to Denver and a one-night stay at the Crown Plaza in Denver.

Liberal Country Club, Ben E. Keith Foods and AB Supreme Cattle Feeders donate all the food for the breakfast.

Major sponsors of the 2008 Red Stocking Breakfast are Black Hills Energy, High Plains Pizza Inc., Keating Tractor & Equipment, KSCB – the Legend, La Mexicana – Rocking M Radio, National Beef and Unicare.

"Attending a Red Stocking Breakfast is a way to help support children and families in the Liberal area, while having a great breakfast with family and friends," Knoll continued. "By attending a breakfast in your area, you're helping to ensure the future availability of programs that keep children safe and strengthen families."

Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door. Kids age 10 and under eat free. Advance tickets are available online at www.kcsl.org .

Tickets are also available by contacting Lisa Knoll at (620) 276-3232 ext. 1106 or lknoll@kcsl.org

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