

### JCPENNEY GIFT CARDS HELP ASSISTANCE LEAGUE DELIVER AID TO 3,553 SCHOOL CHILDREN

Winter's cold weather didn't stand a chance against the combined efforts of JCPenney® and the Assistance League® of Omaha, who joined forces to provide winter coats and school clothing to more than 3,500 area school children during Operation School Bell 2013. With the help of the JCPenney Incentive Sales team, JCPenney gift cards were purchased at a discount by the Assistance League of Omaha with money raised from its fund-raising programs. The JCPenney Incentive Sales team worked closely with the Assistance League of Omaha and the local JCPenney store to organize the event. The program has worked in partnership with JCPenney and their Westroads store since 2009.

Operation School Bell 2013 was so successful that in the final days of the event an additional \$25,000 in JCPenney gift cards were needed. JCPenney Westroads Store Leader Mike Lenz placed a call to JCPenney Incentive Sales in Chicago. He reached

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**Mike Lenz, Store Leader  
JCPenney Westroads**

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McKenzie Stephens, who expedited the order and the cards were emailed in a matter of hours. “JCPenney Incentive Sales was phenomenal,” says Lenz. “We were able to get the cards to the Assistance League so they could take care of those children. To experience that kind of increase in participation over the previous year was pretty exciting.”

Although Assistance Leagues in other states have Operation School Bell programs, the partnership



JCPenney Store Leader Mike Lenz and Operation School Bell Chair Vicki Muilenburg.

between Assistance League of Omaha and JCPenney Westroads has been so successful that it was the subject of a presentation at the National Assistance League convention, and Assistance Leagues in Colorado and Oklahoma have sent representatives to observe the Omaha program in action. Assistance League of Omaha launched Operation School Bell® in 1975. Since then the nonprofit's program has provided new coats and other school-appropriate clothing to nearly 40,000 Omaha school children in grades kindergarten through 8.

Thirty-nine-hundred children from 190 Omaha-area schools, 10 districts, Kindergarten through 8th grade were scheduled to take part in the 2013 event and 3,553 actually participated. More than 200 Assistance League of Omaha members worked alongside JCPenney Westroads associates throughout the event, with 40-45 members on the floor for each of the 16 shifts that took place during the program. The volunteers checked children in at registration, worked as shopping assistants helping children with their choices and calculating total “spend” (amounts are determined by grade level, using a formula the League developed), handed the JCPenney gift cards to JCPenney associates manning the registers, and guided children to a check-out area, where each child got to select a new book.

It was a time of fun and excitement for the children

and their families. “I don’t think any were more excited than one 8-year-old boy who said, ‘I’ve never had a new coat before. I’ve never shopped at the mall before. They made me feel special. I think they knew I was coming,’” says Rose Sheehy, who was Assistance League of Omaha advisor for the October program.

Children are encouraged to purchase winter coats if they don’t have one, and if they have leftover “money,” may use it for other clothing items, including denim and other outerwear. One child used the leftover funds to buy boots, exclaiming “Now I have boots that look just like my friends!”

JCPenney Westroads Store Leader Mike Lenz is just as enthusiastic about the program. “I found it very rewarding to know that we were able to help that many different students in the community,” Lenz says. He notes that JCPenney associates were equally enthusiastic and readily volunteered to help out with the event. “It’s a great response. Everyone,



team, our replenishment team, restock team, and the associates that we pull from other areas of the store,” he explains. “On the merchandise side, the company did a great job of getting us the product we needed.”

Would Lenz advise other JCPenney stores to become involved in such a program? “Absolutely!” In fact, Assistance League’s partnership with JCPenney has withstood the test of time and continues to this day.

There is also the ripple effect of goodwill, extending to the store and to the Assistance League of Omaha and Operation School Bell recipients. An out-of-town couple shopping in the store noticed the large number of children and asked an Assistance League of Omaha volunteer what was going on. After learning what was happening and who benefitted, the couple later sent a note with a check to Assistance League of Omaha in support of the program.

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Rose Sheehy, AL of Omaha advisor  
for the October program

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from the sales floor to the replenishment associates, has built a relationship with Assistance League of Omaha members because they’ve participated in the past. They get very excited knowing this event is coming up, that they will be a part of it, and that it helps the community.”

“The program involves not only the children’s department but also our pricing team, our support

**ABOUT ASSISTANCE LEAGUE:** Assistance League is a national nonprofit organization that puts caring and commitment into action through community-based philanthropic programs. Created in Los Angeles in 1894, Assistance League now has 122 chapters nationwide and 26,000 member volunteers. Operation School Bell® was launched 50 years ago to “provide clothing to disadvantaged children.” It is now the signature philanthropic program of 117 Assistance League chapters.