

Local law enforcement officers joined together last Saturday to make this Christmas a little more merry for local low-income families.

The annual local Shop-With-A-Cop program traveled to the Walmart in Scottsburg and shopped for more than 85 kids, according to one of the event's organizers Eric Mills.

Mills, who is an officer with the Salem Police Department, said roughly 70 kids were in tow as they made the trip down State Road 56.

He said the shopping day is one of his favorite days of the year.

"It's just great to be with the kids," Mills said. "It really lets them see us (police officers) in a different light. There are some, that the only time they see us is when something bad happens, but this allows them to see us differently."

Melissa Burton volunteers to help do the shopping every year. She agreed with Mills about it being one of her favorite days.

"I have been volunteering with Shop With A Cop and the Christmas Assistance Program for the past 7 years," she said. "I think its been such an important yearly event to me and my family because we were fortunate enough to be able to always make sure our boys had gifts under the tree and we want to make sure and pay it forward each year however we can."

Burton said of those seven years she has been helping, she recalls a year when her family got to take part.

"Honestly, I've loved each and every year, but a few years ago I had my husband and both sons volunteering with me," she said, "I loved watching Roger and Hayden shopping with a little boy, they were smiling just as much as he was!"

"When you take the kids back home and you see the thankfulness in the parents' eyes or the tears streaming down their face, let's just say, it was a good day!"

Stacy Collier volunteered for the first time this year and said she was blown away by the experience.

"I don't think I could put into words what a wonderful program this is," she said. "They do make sure the kids get a few toys, but more importantly I saw a winter coat, warm clothing and necessities in most every cart."

Collier said the success of the program is a true testament to how folks in Washington County look after one another.

As for her day, she said she spent it with a very energetic and articulate toddler.

"I am quite sure I was feeling as blessed as he was as he put his 'treasures' in the cart," Collier said. "I hope to be able to participate next year! The individuals who have made this program what it is have certainly done an amazing job!"

Mills said a lot of work goes into making SWAC a success. He said outside of the local law enforcement community and their families, the community as a whole makes the event what it is.

He said from the people who donate, to the ones who show up to help on that day, SWAC is total team effort.

Mills also said he can't say enough about Marie Lowry and McDonalds for donating both food

and services for the kids and volunteers.

There are still kids' names being turned into the local Christmas assistance programs and donations are still being accepted.

Mills said anyone wishing to make a donation may do so at the Salem Police Department or the Washington County Sheriff's Department.

He said once Christmas is over, plans for next year begin.