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Shop with a Cop puts jingle in kids' pockets

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By Seth Kabala

Counting down the days until Christmas, many shoppers run caffeine-charged fingers over their still-to-buy lists. But what if you had no list? Or one that barely resembled typical wants?

Officer Patrick Robinson of the Silvis Police Department is championing Silvis' Shop with a Cop charitable program this year, getting ready to spread cheer in the lives of 16 kids from George O. Barr School, who'll receive a shopping trip at the Silvis Walmart on Tuesday morning.

"I'm going to take eight on the elementary side and eight out of the junior high side," Officer Robinson said. "The kids are selected by the school staff, mostly by the counselors, based on academic performance, doing well in school." Economic need also affects selections, he said.

Once he has the names, Officer Robinson solicits donations from local businesses, including Walmart, which contributed \$1,000 to the program, he said, adding that the Silvis Police Association also contributes.

"I'll get somewhere in the neighborhood of about \$100 per kid," he said. "We'll put that on a gift card.... We'll go pick up the kids from school (and) bus them up there."

Once on-site, each child teams up with a role model. "I have a bunch of officers, and if I don't have enough volunteers, I'll bring a bunch of firefighters in uniform," Officer Robinson said.

After the shopping, Walmart provides a bag lunch for the kids, and, while they're eating, Officer Robinson and volunteers will gift-wrap all the kids' purchases.

The kids are unrestricted in their choices of how to use the money, but their own generosity surprises Officer Robinson.

"It's amazing, these kids," he said. "You'd think they would go in there and buy three video games and call it a day."

"But you see a lot of them buying underwear or clothes, shoes, socks -- stuff they realize they really need." Some kids choose to shop for their siblings and parents rather than themselves, he said. "So it's a great program."

Anyone wishing to donate can contact Officer Robinson at (309) 714-2094