

Drumming up support for kids

Local teen drumming sensation holds Toys for Tots event

BY HEIDI ROMAN
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STERLING HEIGHTS — Jason Hartless is arguably much busier than most teens his age. The 14-year-old Fraser resident has just spent the past year traveling thousands of miles across the United States and Canada, touring with bands, filming an instructional DVD and recording music.

Hartless has gained notoriety as a drumming sensation, playing the drums since he was a toddler. Drumsticks produced by Vater Percussion bear his signature, and he has two albums with his band, Shram, scheduled for release within the next few months.

Despite his calendar being filled with musical engagements, Hartless plans to continue a tradition he began in elementary school.

On Dec. 13, Hartless will

host his fifth annual Jason Hartless and Friends Rockin' for Tots event, an all-day musical benefit held outside of the Toys "R" Us store in Sterling Heights. Between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., Hartless' band and other bands will perform under a heated tent while collecting unwrapped toys for the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve program.

"Every year, I have a goal," Hartless said. "One year, we raised more than 17 boxes (of toys) ... I've got a feeling this year is going to be bigger."

Hartless hopes people continue to support the event, even in the poor economy.

"I think it helps kids so much with their Christmases," he said. "It makes them happy and joyful. A lot of kids don't get Christmas."

Prudential Protective Services is providing Hartless and the bands with a big tent and a

strong heater to keep them warm during the nine-hour event. Usually the group is frozen solid by the end of the day, said Hartless' father, Jason Hartless. The elder Hartless believes it helps his son realize what can be accomplished with hard work.

"It's not an easy thing," he said. "Every year when he's done, he says it is the last year he's going to do it. But he wakes up the next morning and says he'll do it again."

The feeling Hartless gets from collecting toys for children in need is too great to pass up, he says.

Toys "R" Us is located at 13801 Lakeside Circle at the corner of Hall Road and Schoenherr in Sterling Heights. Visit www.toysfortots.org for more information about the program.

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