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Yes Santa, there is an uptown in Bayonne

Local businessman hopes to start revival of the north side

by Al Sullivan

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According to an old adage, big things tend to start small, something Vincent Virga, president of Partnership Financial Services, hopes is true with the kick-off of a community food and toy drive he has called Miracle on 34th Street.

This holiday drive helps generate food for hungry families in Bayonne and toys for kids who might not get presents for Christmas.

This is the first step, Virga said, toward getting residents and businesses involved in the uptown community again.

Like the downtown sections of the city – Town Center and Bergen Point – Uptown used to have a merchant’s association that helped promote that part of the city. But the group faded into history, leaving the northernmost portion of the city without an organizing tool just when the area needs help the most.

**“If one person comes through every day until
Christmas, that’s 25 items we can share.” – Vincent
Virga**

“I’m trying to get people involved in the community,” Virga said.

With this holiday effort, Virga said he hopes to begin something that will evolve into community effort for future projects.

“We’re calling it Miracle on 34th Street,” he said.

The idea is that somehow the first effort will cascade into a broader effort later.

In an arrangement made with Judicke’s Bakery, people dropping off non-perishable food items or new and unused toys at the office of PFS will receive a coupon for a complementary Danish and coffee.

In conjunction with this, PFS will offer photos with Santa on Saturday, Dec. 12, from noon to 3 p.m. with any toy or food item dropped off.

Virga doesn’t expect the whole town to turn out, but he’s hoping for a good showing.

“I’m not asking for 70,000 people to bring something,” he said. “But it is like one

a day multivitamins. It just takes one a day to improve well-being. If one person comes through every day until Christmas, that's 25 items we can share."

His goal is to have more things come later.

Virga's efforts seem to reflect something Third Ward Councilman Gary LaPelusa is attempting when LaPelusa began a festival last year.

"I'm not trying to make this political," Virga said. "But it may be a good idea to reach out to Gary. This is his district. All I want to do is plant a seed. Sometimes, it only takes one person to start something."

The need to help hit Virga when he became involved with the Soup Kitchen at Assumption Church. A member of St. Andrew's Parish – one of the three churches involved in running the Soup Kitchen – Virga said he saw the need first-hand.

"Many of the people you might see walking up and down Broadway don't know where to go to get a meal," he said. "It really opened my eyes and my son's."

Because his son is a freshman at Marist High School, Virga went to talk to Brother Steve, the principal there, about how to help. He eventually went to Father Joe Barbone at Assumption Church, and came up with this concept. The food will go to the Soup Kitchen, and the toys will be donated to St. Andrew's, where there is a Christmas fund to collect toys for needy kids.

"I would love to get businesses on and around 34th Street to participate in this," Virga said. "We live and work in this community, and this would be for the betterment of this town."

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