Flagler County Senior Services spreads Christmas cheer through annual gift drive ‘Be a Santa to a Senior’

**December 23, 2020** – Flagler County Senior Services spreads Christmas cheer through annual gift drive, “Be a Santa to a Senior,” making it possible for 194 Flagler County residents to receive gifts who wouldn’t have had Christmas presents otherwise.

“We weren’t sure if we were going to have the gift drive this year due to so many challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Health and Human Services Director Joyce Bishop. “But community giving increased significantly this year and our community partners were very generous with their time and effort to help make this possible. So we made adjustments and took necessary precautions to safely make the deliveries.”

On December 18, Santa and his elves, consisting of Senior Services staff, took to the streets of Flagler County to deliver the holiday gifts. A four-vehicle caravan headed out with close to 400 gifts making door-to-door deliveries along their way.

Wickline Senior Center Site Leader Frances Gallagher was Santa. Program Aide Shannon Keppler and Case Manager Winnie Costello assisted with gifts and driving. Case Manager Ben O’Kelley, Flagler County Fire Rescue Lieutenant John Keppler, and Adult Day Center Program Manager Janet Jensen provided vocals as each household was greeted with Christmas Caroling.

The event was enjoyed as much by the staff as the seniors since the Senior Center and Adult Day Center have been closed since mid-March. The visits were very welcomed as staff and seniors were happy and grateful to see each other. Recipients were homebound seniors, those living alone, working through difficult times in need of support and holiday cheer.

Planning began months in advanced, as staff work in collaboration with several community partners. Gifts were collected and donated by Home Instead Senior Care, Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Synergy, First Florida Insurance and community group Halifaxes of Halifax Plantation.
As with years past, Walgreens has contributed by putting up Christmas trees with ornaments identifying the seniors’ gift needs in all three of their stores locally. Many gifts were contributed by Walgreens’ customers through this program.

“The response within the community is awesome,” said Bishop. “The kindness, care and concern in providing for Flagler’s seniors is unsurpassed. This event, in its various versions, has grown more and more successful over its many years. The response from the seniors has been overwhelming, certainly bringing out the kid in all of us as the holiday is meant to do.”

In Photos: Health and Human Services Director Joyce Bishop, Wickline Senior Center Site Leader Frances Gallagher was Santa. Program Aide Shannon Keppler and Case Manager Winnie Costello, Case Manager Ben O’Kelley, Flagler County Fire Rescue Lieutenant John Keppler, and Adult Day Center Program Manager Janet Jensen