



Saint Viator Wrestlers Partner with Salvation Army and 103.5 KISS FM

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Members of the wrestling team pose for a picture while packing the CTA bus.

It's not often that wrestlers from Saint Viator High School find themselves getting a shout out on 103.5 KISS FM, but that's just what happened earlier this month when the wrestling team left their mats.

Members of the varsity wrestling squad teamed up with the Salvation Army and 103.5 KISS FM's "Stuff-A-Bus" project. For five days in mid-December, station officials promoted filling an entire CTA bus with items for families served by the Salvation Army, including toys, blankets, coats, clothing and canned goods.

Last year, the drive helped more than 700 families, KISS FM station officials say, and this year they hoped to impact even more.

Jordan, one of KISS FM's on-air personalities, broadcasted live from the bus every day of the drive, and on the last day, Dec. 15, he publicly thanked the Saint Viator wrestling team for their donations and their brawn.

"The wrestling team was a huge help," Jordan said later. "They arrived right when the final push for donations began and assisted us in placing large heavy items and bags on the bus. Without their help, it's very likely I would have injured my back!"

Even their head coach was surprised at seeing the gentler side of his wrestlers, who had plenty of energy left for the service project after having a two-hour practice.

"I have been the head coach now for three years, and we had never done anything like this before," says Coach Jeff Kramarczyk. "But the response was overwhelming."

At first, the team planned to just donate items for the drive. On the day of the project, the student-athletes arrived with giant stuffed animals, board games, jackets, shoes and other clothing, before the coaches added some leftover apparel, including hooded sweatshirts, shorts, sweatpants and T-shirts.

The team's donation alone filled an entire school van, and when they arrived at the Brickyard Shopping Center on Chicago's Northwest side where the drive took place, they loaded their gifts and then stayed to help stuff the bus with additional donations.

"When we arrived, the bus was about three-fourths full," Kramarczyk said. "We stayed for two hours and by then, the bus was full.

"All the kids could do was tell me how much fun they had," he added, "and that they would like to do it again next year."

The wrestling team was the latest from Saint Viator to participate in the athletic department's theme this year: Victory in service.

"Volunteering like this makes for great team building, but it also furthers their Viatorian

education,” says Tim Carlson, athletic director. “Incorporating Christian service is part of the Viatorian identity and the hallmark of a Saint Viator education.”