



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 15, 2016

Contact: Taryn Duffy, Empire City Casino 914-457-2431, [tduffy@empirecitycasino.com](mailto:tduffy@empirecitycasino.com); Paul Costiglio, Catholic Charities 646-794-2240, [Paul.Costiglio@archny.org](mailto:Paul.Costiglio@archny.org); John Cirillo, Cirillo World 914-260-7436, [johnnycigarpr@aol.com](mailto:johnnycigarpr@aol.com)

Photos: <http://bit.ly/EmpireCityToyandCoatDrive>

Photo Credit: Mike Rooney



*Tim Rooney (left), President & CEO of Empire City Casino and Monsignor Kevin Sullivan (right), Executive Director of Catholic Charities, are joined by Josh Blake (center) of Costa Mesa, CA. Blake has donated over 2500 new toys to the casino's Toy & Coat Drive over the past 5 years to benefit New York families in need.*

## **Nearly 1,000 Toys & Coats Presented to Catholic Charities at 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Toy & Coat Drive Empire City Casino Urges Community to Assist Families in Need throughout Westchester County**

**Yonkers, New York** – Christmas came early at Empire City Casino with the presentation to **Catholic Charities** of nearly one thousand toys and coats collected during the casino's **Tenth Annual "Christmas Spirit" Toy and Coat Drive**. The donations will ensure that New Yorkers in need have a warm coat this winter and a toy or two to put under the Christmas tree for their children.

**Timothy J. Rooney**, president and CEO of Empire City Casino, presented the annual donation to **Monsignor Kevin Sullivan**, executive director of **Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York** and **Órla Kelleher**, executive director of Aisling Irish Community Center of Yonkers. The presentation took place inside the casino atrium with the donated toys and coats on full display.

Joining Rooney and Monsignor Sullivan were Westchester County Executive **Robert P. Astorino**; Mayor of the City of Yonkers **Mike Spano**; New York State Senate Minority Leader **Andrea Stewart-Cousins**; New York State Senator **George Latimer**; New York State Assembly Member **Shelley Mayer**; New York State Assembly Member **Gary Pretlow**; and Westchester County Legislator **David Tubiolo**. Reminding the public that there is need in the County, those assembled made their own contributions and encouraged both corporations and individuals to give back to the community.

Though Westchester County is often considered to be an affluent and wealthy community because of its median income of \$83,422, there are still extreme pockets of poverty. Recent statistics indicate nearly 10 percent of Westchester residents are living in poverty, and 31 percent of that population is under the age of 17. Over 12 percent of families do not have anyone in the household employed, and 52 percent of those living in poverty are single parents.

*"Social responsibility is not just for corporations, it is imperative we all do what we can," said Rooney. "Giving back is about community and helping others move forward. There are no greater deeds than charity and service."*

The drive to help families in our communities attracted some West Coast warmth. **Josh Blake**, president of California-based and family-owned company, **The Gander Group**, donated hundreds of toys to the annual drive. This is the fifth consecutive year that Blake and his family have showered New Yorkers with their generosity. He is committed to assisting those less fortunate, and participates in toy drives like Empire City's, and also donates time, money, food and clothing to those who need assistance. *"This is my favorite time of year," said Blake. "Giving brings me joy. My life has been fortunate, I have a wonderful family, a wonderful company and I am surrounded by love. Every year I try to give back and spread that love to others."*



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Another annual key contributor to the effort is **John Lennon**, owner of Yonkers-based **Smart Move & Storage**, who generously donates his company's services to transport and store of all donations while they are distributed by local community organizations.

*"Once again we are fortunate, through the generosity of Tim Rooney and the Empire City Casino family for this donation of toys and coats that will benefit some of the more vulnerable families that we work with in the City of Yonkers and beyond,"* said **Monsignor Sullivan**. *"In this Christmas season we are grateful that this spirit of generosity and caring enables Catholic Charities to provide help and new hope in the lives of Non-Catholics and Catholics alike whom we serve."*

For the 10th consecutive year, Empire City Casino and Catholic Charities have teamed to make the holiday season warmer and happier for those New York families in need. This year's "Christmas Spirit" Toy and Coat Drive began November 1<sup>st</sup> and generous donors have given over 600 toys and more than four hundred coats. The toys and coats will be distributed through Catholic Charities community agencies to families in need. The toy and coat drive has become a holiday tradition at Empire City Casino and thousands of toys and coats have been donated since 2007 when the campaign was first launched.

*"Aisling Irish Community Center is delighted to be chosen again this year as a recipient of Empire City Casino's annual coat and toy drive,"* said **Kelleher**. *"Aisling Irish Community Center is widely recognized as a resource and respite center in Yonkers. We provide programs and services for the more vulnerable people in our community, i.e. seniors, low income families, homeless, etc. Empire City Casino's generous contribution to our holiday appeal is welcomed with open arms by Aisling Irish Community Center as well as by all the grateful recipients."*

*"The holidays provide a wonderful opportunity to show goodwill to our neighbors,"* said **Westchester County Executive Robert Astorino**. *"Once again, Empire City Casino, and all the generous donors who contributed to the toy and coat drive, are making the holidays brighter, warmer and happier."*

*"The holiday season is not about what we hope to receive in gifts but rather how we can give of ourselves to benefit others in our community,"* said **Mayor Mike Spano**. *"The annual toy and coat drive, hosted by our generous and supportive partners at Empire City Casino, is one example among many of Yonkers uniting together in generosity and service during the season of giving. I want to thank Tim Rooney, Jr. and the entire team at Empire City Casino for their continued commitment to Yonkers."*

*"The holiday season is a time of giving,"* said **Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. *"Empire City Casino has worked with Catholic Charities for ten years to distribute toys and coats to kids who might otherwise have nothing to open during the holidays. I'm grateful to represent such a generous community and I encourage everyone to contribute to this charitable effort. The best way to show our appreciation for all the great things in our lives is to extend a helping hand to those who need it."*

*"This is one of my favorite events of the year. Catholic Charities does such good work providing for our needy neighbors, and Empire City Casino and the Rooney family continue to show their generosity right here in Yonkers. The families in this area that are in need have really hit the jackpot with these two groups,"* said Senator **Latimer**.

*"No act of giving is ever too small or unappreciated and I commend Mr. Rooney and the Empire City Casino for their ongoing effort in providing toys and coats that will offer a special, joyous and warm holiday season for hundreds of families throughout our community,"* said **Assemblymember Pretlow**.

*"The Rooney Family and the staff at Empire City Casino at Yonkers Raceway have been wonderful and caring partners to all the members of our Yonkers family. Year after year, they have joined with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York to make the holiday season a bit brighter for those who face additional challenges. I appreciate all they do to support our neighbors and am proud to be part of this effort,"* said **Assemblymember Mayer**.

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***About Catholic Charities:***

Catholic Charities, a federation of approximately 90 agencies and programs located throughout the 10 counties of the Archdiocese of New York, helps solve the problems of New Yorkers in need – non-Catholics and Catholics alike— with services that protect and nurture children, resolve family crises, assist the hungry and homeless, support the physically and emotionally challenged, and integrate immigrants and refugees.

***About Empire City Casino at Yonkers Raceway:***

Empire City Casino is one of the largest entertainment and gaming destinations in the northeast. Featuring 5,300 of the hottest slots, electronic craps, roulette, three card poker, blackjack, baccarat and sic bo, Empire City Casino also offers guests year-round harness racing and International simulcasting, live entertainment including the best party, tribute and Latin bands, comedy, New York's hottest DJ's, and more. A plethora of dining options will satisfy even the most discerning palate with Italian cuisine at Nonno's Trattoria; Dan Rooney's, a high-energy sports bar; Alley 810, a craft cocktail lounge with retro bowling lanes; and convenient delicious options at the International Food Court or Lil' Cocina. Visit Empire City Casino at Yonkers Raceway located at 810 Yonkers Avenue (off I-87 at Central Avenue) Yonkers, NY, Westchester County, open seven days a week from 10:00am to 6:00am. Visit [www.empirecitycasino.com](http://www.empirecitycasino.com) or call 914.968.4200 for information.

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