

Put the KETTLE ON-LINE

Colored lights and Christmas carols. Santa Claus and sleigh bells. Fancy wrapping and children laughing. These are some of the sights and sounds of Christmas.

For the last 125 years, red kettles and ringing bells have also been familiar sights and sounds. That's how long The Salvation Army has been raising funds to help the needy with their ubiquitous bell ringers in cities around the world. In fact, The Salvation Army calls it "one of the most recognizable and important charitable campaigns."



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

The coins or folding money you toss into their kettles help provide toys, clothing, food and other services for struggling families all year round.

If it makes you feel good to pitch a few coins into the kettle for a good cause, imagine how good you would feel if you could fill an entire kettle with cash. And what if you could do it without standing in the cold ringing a bell all day? Thanks to the combined magic of Christmas, social media and **OnlineRedKettle.org**, you can collect donations for The Salvation Army from friends, family and associates all day and night without even having to step outside.

The website allows you to set up virtual kettle collection pages with the

proceeds going to local Salvation Army programs. There are three types of kettles available:

■ **Individual** — This is a personal kettle that allows you to solicit donations under your own name.

■ **Team** — A team kettle is a collection of individual kettles with the donations being pooled under the team name. A small business, sports team or group of friends can create a team kettle.

■ **Company** — A company kettle is a collection of team and individual kettles that combine the money they raise and submit it under the company name. A larger organization with multiple departments can set up several team and individual kettles under the umbrella of the company kettle.

Follow the recipe

You have to register with the site, which is free, to set up a kettle page. You can create a new account or sign up using your existing Facebook, Twitter, Google or OpenID accounts. Once your page is set up you can use email and social media to spread the word to all of your contacts. The pages will stay active until the end of January.

There's a standard template available to set up your kettle page, with some options for customization. Information on the individual or group sponsoring the page is displayed. There's an area for a message to potential donors. You can craft your own plea or choose from a number of pre-written messages provided by the Salvation Army. There's also an area where you can upload photos for a gallery of you or your group in action.

And of course there are tools to accept donations on the page. Donors can click

on a range of pre-set dollar amounts from \$25 to \$500, or they can enter any amount you like. Each page has a goal for the amount of money it hopes to raise and a progress bar indicating how close to the goal it is. There are also statistics on donors, amounts, events and more.

What's cooking?

The Online Red Kettle home page has links to some of the top performing kettle pages. If you're thinking of starting a kettle page they provide good examples of successful pitches.

There are several videos on the page featuring people who have been helped by The Salvation Army. There's also a link to a page featuring 12 ways the organization has helped feed the hungry, lift people out of addiction, shelter the homeless, nurture the children and aid those afflicted by poverty or disaster.

A contact page, a search page for kettles and a frequently asked questions page pretty much round out the rest of the site.

While the site's content isn't very broad or deep, its impact can be tremendous. All of those little kettles filling up on the street and online can make for many very merry Christmases for those who might have gone without.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.