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NEWS RELEASE

DC-BALTIMORE CHAPTER JOINS 800 UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ALUMNI WHO EXTEND CHRISTMAS OFF CAMPUS TO CHAPTER CITIES

DAYTON, Ohio — When they were students at the University of Dayton, they cherished the Dec. 8 tradition of celebrating Christmas On Campus with their friends and children from the Dayton area. Now that they're alumni, many have continued the tradition by performing Christmas service in their own cities.

The Washington/Baltimore chapter will celebrate Christmas Off Campus with the residents of St. Martin's House, 116 T St. NE, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 10.

"Christmas On Campus always started with the lighting of the Christmas tree, and the first thing we do at St. Martin's is bring in the Christmas tree that we're donating to the home and decorate it with the children," said Nancy Arms, a 1997 graduate of UD who is one of the chief organizers of this year's event. "This year we are making ornaments with the kids so they will be able to add their own personal touch to the tree."

St. Martin's serves women who have experienced substance abuse and/or homelessness and their children. At the party this year will be nine women and 21 children as well as about 60 University of Dayton alumni and their families.

Snacks and a visit from Santa Claus will round out the festivities on Sunday. As with the on-campus celebration, the children and their moms will receive presents supplied by the UD folks.

"The idea of 'adopting' someone is what I think people connect to the most," said Lisa Brown, 1998 graduate and co-organizer of the event. "This is especially true of people who don't have other kids to shop for. They love to find the perfect toy and see the look on the face of the child they bought it for.

"This time of year is traditionally one of the busiest times, yet people make time to come to this," Brown added. "Out of all the alumni chapter events, this one has one of the highest attendances. People want this good holiday feeling, and it's something younger and older alumni alike can participate in."

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At St. Martin's, the gift giving is a two-way street. "Last year all the kids of the house recited a little poem that one of the boys had written and then they sang a song for us," Brown said.

Nearly 800 alumni participated in Christmas Off Campus events last year, and the number is expected to grow this year. Eighteen chapters ranging from San Francisco to New Jersey have planned activities that include gathering musical instruments for a grade school and holding a Christmas party for youngsters at a ranch for abused and neglected children.

Now in its 37th year, Christmas On Campus began as a way for UD students to celebrate the holidays with one another before leaving campus for the semester. It quickly evolved into a service tradition, with students "adopting" children from the Dayton area for the evening, hosting them for a tree-lighting ceremony, a live nativity scene, gifts, caroling, arts and crafts projects, and carnival games. Last year about 8,000 children and adults came to campus for the event.

Christmas On Campus is always held Dec. 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a Marian holiday important to the UD community. The University of Dayton was founded and is sponsored by the Society of Mary, a Roman Catholic teaching order of priests and brothers who emphasize the faith characteristics of Mary — community, humility, simplicity and hospitality — in their own religious tradition.

Alumni chapters time their own celebrations close to the feast day.

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For media interviews, contact **Nancy Arms** at (410) 732-1199 and **Lisa Brown** at (202) 387-7946. For information on the Christmas Off Campus tradition nationally, call **Laura Hooper**, assistant director of alumni programs, at (937) 229-3299.