Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: The countdown to Christmas is well underway. As we shop for presents, decorate our homes and plan gatherings with loved ones, another thing on our to-do list should include how we can give back to our community during the holiday season. I'm Emily Yeap.

Alex Johnson, director of Community Involvement and Service in the Center for Community Engagements (CCE) at Missouri State University, is my guest today. He explains why nonprofit organizations in our area need our support even more during the holidays and suggests ways we can partner with them.

Alex Johnson: Nonprofit organizations typically need more help during the holiday season because the demand during this time seems to grow based on the increase in costs. This time of year, property taxes, gifts, higher utilities, new clothes and food to support folks in need, also unexpected costs are all factors this time of year. Because they rise, support from passionate, giving neighbors is always appreciated.

Emily Yeap: From donating our money to a charity to helping with a drive for winter wear, there are many ways for community members to participate in social good.

Alex Johnson: The biggest needs in the community can come in the form of multiple different support. Monetary donations, donated goods, the donation of time from volunteers, are all essential in providing support to those in need. Small donations of $5 or more from large groups can really go a long way to fill gaps for utilities, rental assistance and other operational costs. This time of year as the weather gets colder, families begin to ask for coats and warmer clothes, specifically at places like the Salvation Army and the Victory Mission.

Emily Yeap: Johnson highlights a few specific opportunities with MSU's community partners.

Alex Johnson: One of our partners, the Northwest Project, provides support to families in Springfield to overcome challenges that have kept them living in poverty. In order to sustain their long-term success, the Northwest Project invites community supporters to engage in several ways.

First, they're always looking for reliable and consistent volunteers to work alongside their participants' kids on Monday and Tuesday nights. If there are groups looking for a long-term engagement project, they're invited to join the One Church One Family program to support specific families.

Another one of their greatest consistent physical needs is quality furniture, including couches, beds, kitchen tables and also home appliances like washers and dryers.

Another one of Missouri State's great partners is the Ozarks Food Harvest. They're a hub for food distribution in southwest Missouri. They could always use monetary donations, volunteers to help sort and repackage those goods that they receive as donations as well.

Victory Mission is also always looking for volunteers to serve their evening meal, and at their food pantry. They've recently seen quite an increase in individuals accessing the food pantry, and the evening meal participation has almost doubled.

One of our partners, Burrell Behavioral Health Center, is working alongside local law enforcement officials to provide warm weather kits to folks in need this time of year. You can donate kits, including gloves, hats, scarves, to the Burrell Behavioral Health Center, or at the Center for Community Engagement here on campus.

Emily Yeap: MSU's Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Government Association and Plaster Student Union are also sponsoring the Giving Tree 2017 donation drive to benefit several local organizations. Donations are due December 14th.

Alex Johnson: These agencies include Isabel’s House, Diaper Bank of the Ozarks, the Rare Breed and Northview Senior Center. Needed items and drop off locations can be found in the Plaster Student Union, and in locations across campus.

Emily Yeap: Johnson believes each one of us can be a change agent in our community this holiday season and throughout the year.

Alex Johnson: Our goal in the Center for Community Engagement is to work alongside students and community members to pinpoint their skills and passions, to develop strong partnerships in the community. I encourage people to visit givepulse.com to find service opportunities. Givepulse.com is a really great way to learn more about our nonprofit community, and also take the next step to address issues as a volunteer, and as an advocate.

Emily Yeap: To find out more about the CCE and opportunities to serve, contact Johnson at (417) 836-5774. I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.