



JEFF RICHARDS/Star-Gazette

Area Rent-A-Center store managers assemble Wednesday on Columbia Street in Elmira as they prepare to offer \$50 credit vouchers to residents.

## Kindness, with no strings

■ Workers raise some eyebrows as they offer to help residents with heating bills.

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Star-Gazette

Wearing white T-shirts and armed with clipboards and postcards, Rent-A-Center employees knocked on doors Wednesday morning to offer 400 Elmira families each a \$50 credit toward their home heating bills — without a catch.

About 25 employees from stores in Bath, Corning, Mansfield, Sayre, Horseheads and Elmira, along with local City Council members, walked along city streets throughout the day handing out \$50 New York State Electric & Gas Corp. credits to those who would answer their doors and

take them.

At times, the employees were met with skepticism.

"Did you hear him? He said no at first," said Kristy Heverly, manager of the Bath store, after approaching the first house on Columbia Street. "When he realized there wasn't a catch, then he was interested."

The drive was part of Rent-A-Center's statewide community initiative launched Wednesday titled Random Acts of Caring, said Gus Whitcomb, Rent-A-Center vice president of public affairs.

"We looked for a city that really embodied New York's struggles, but a city that had a vision to make things better," Whitcomb said. "This was designed to make people's day better."

"It's a cool idea," said Lynne Sullivan, of West Fourth Street, who took a postcard for her landlady, Judy Cogswell. "I don't know anyone who couldn't use the help these

days."

When Heverly and her co-worker, Pete Cooper, manager of the Mansfield Rent-A-Center, asked Janet Beard, 24, of West Fourth Street if she would be interested in a \$50 NYSEG credit, Beard quickly answered, "Yes."

"It's wonderful," Beard said.

Elmira's 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th districts were selected based on the city's Web site, which mapped out poverty lines, said Benjamin Roberts of Buffalo, senior account executive with e3communications, the company that helped coordinate the effort.

"This isn't promotional," Roberts said. "It's kind."

Rent-A-Center employees took down the names and addresses for NYSEG, then discarded the information so it couldn't be used for any other purpose, according to the postcard distributed to residents. The credit should

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appear on the recipient's bill within the next two cycles, the postcard states.

At least once a month, Rent-A-Center plans to dispatch workers in at least one

community in the state to surprise them with something designed to "brighten their day," Whitcomb said.

"Random is the key word," he said. "No one will know when, where or how Rent-A-Center will make a difference in a deserving group of people's lives. It could happen anywhere, anytime."

# Opinion

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Associate Editor

## Random acts, repeat offender,

### ■ Hit: Company tries handouts

Sometimes you can't even give money away. At least that is what it seemed like for Rent-A-Center employees as they walked up to households in Elmira on Wednesday to hand out \$50 vouchers for residents to use as a credit toward their monthly gas and electric bill.

The rental center company, with a store in Elmira, launched its Random Acts of Caring campaign in the city with employees fanning out in four of the city's six City Council districts to knock on doors and hand out the credits. Some residents were skeptical about the offer and even refused. Others were grateful.

No matter what the reaction, it was a generous gesture by the corporation that ought to be appreciated by the city and the recipients.

### ■ Miss: Leaky parole system

See if you can figure out what is wrong with this scenario: A man is sentenced to prison for two bank robberies in 1999, one in Corning and the other in Clifton Springs. He's also charged with other such robberies in the Syracuse area, and in 2005 he gets out of the state slammer for the Corning and Clifton Springs holdups with seven

### Hits & Misses

years of parole facing him. Within the next two years after his release, he ends up being charged with or suspected of robbing banks in Ithaca, Corning and Watkins Glen.

You get the picture. Most taxpayers in New York would wonder how David Harrington, the arrested suspect in the Jan. 17 holdup of Community Bank N.A. in Watkins Glen, ever got back on the street so soon. How he ever convinced the state Parole Board he would go forth and rob no more is a nagging question, especially because he had been implicated in other bank robberies.

If convicted of the most recent charge, Harrington, who is from the Rochester area, would be treated as a repeat felon and likely wouldn't get the break he got before. Or at least let's hope that's the case, because he seems to like this area's banks.

### ■ Hit: Steuben project aims for safety

The media are often lambasted for not highlighting kids when they do good things. Here's a good deed by one teen

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