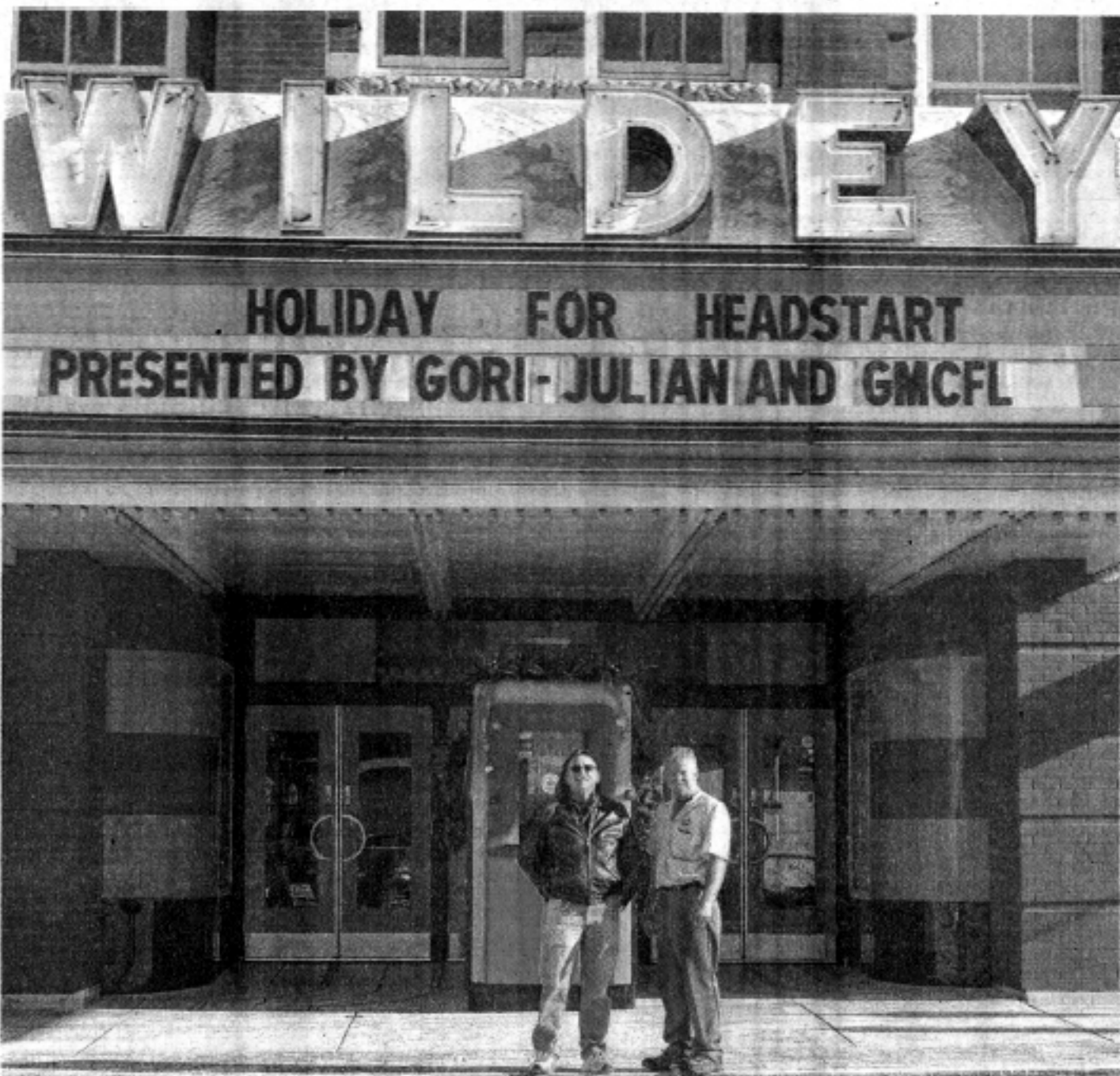


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COURTESY OF KRISTEN GOSLING

Rick Stamer (left) and John Ciszcon stand in front of the Wildey Theatre in Edwardsville where dozens of Riverbend Head Start & Family Services' families watched a free screening of "Polar Express," presented by Gori Julian & Associates and the Greater Madison County Federation of Labor.

Duo help raise funds for groceries

Hugs from needy families and a fist pump from a preschooler were all the result of the hard work of John Ciszcon and Rick Stamer who chaired the Greater Madison County Federation of Labor's Holiday for Head Start campaign, according to a press release.

The union members raised \$11,600 that was used to purchase \$100 gift cards to union area grocery stores. They presented the gift cards to all 45 families enrolled at Riverbend Head Start & Family Services' Edwardsville Head Start center on Dec. 12.

"Seeing the look on these families' faces," said Ciszcon. "That's my Christmas gift. There is nothing that will top that."

Ciszcon is a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 155 and has been collecting donations to sponsor Edwardsville Head Start families during the holidays. He spoke to GMCFL Executive Board Member Rick Stamer

about his passion for the agency's mission and they brainstormed ways to help more families.

"He told me he's raised in the last six years like \$300 to \$700 each year," said Stamer. "I said John; we can do better than that. I'm in."

The two came up with the Holiday for Head Start campaign. The GMCFL mailed letters to supporters and asked them to donate \$100 to sponsor a Head Start family for the holidays.

Madison County families qualify for Head Start because they have a child between the ages of birth and 5 and live below the Federal Poverty Line, which is \$23,550 for a family of four.

The letter resulted in 122 gift cards for impoverished families in Alton, Granite City, Collinsville and Edwardsville.

"It's easy to ask for money. It's the guys who write the checks who need to be thanked," said Stamer.

"I can't thank everyone enough. It's

nice to know that there are people out there who are willing to make a sacrifice to live up lesser fortunate families' holiday season," said Ciszcon.

The federation and Gori, Julian & Associates also sponsored a free movie event at the Wildey Theatre, Edwardsville and Collinsville Head Start families were treated to a screening of the holiday classic "Polar Express." After the movie finished, Stamer walked around the theater and saw something he will never forget.

"I saw a boy look up at his dad, raise his arm, give a big fist pump and said, 'That was awesome.' That was all I needed. I knew we had done a good job," said Stamer.

To make a donation to the campaign, mail it to Riverbend Head Start & Family Services at 550 Landmarks Blvd., P.O. Box 250, Alton, IL 62002. Checks should be made out to Riverbend Head Start & Family Services and include "Holiday for Head Start" in the memo line.