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## RICHMOND CHRISTMAS MOTHER FUND

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# Richmond Christmas Mother Fund receives record \$50,000 donation to kick off fundraising season

By HOLLY PRESTIDGE Richmond Times-Dispatch 20 hrs ago



Donna Dean Stevens (second from left) presented a \$50,000 donation Wednesday to Christmas Mother April Niamtu, alongside their husbands, Jayson Stevens (left) and Dr. Joseph Niamtu III.

MARK GORMUS/TIMES-DISPATCH



## ABOUT THE RICHMOND CHRISTMAS MOTHER FUND

The Richmond Christmas Mother Fund began in 1935 with the mission to help bring Christmas to underprivileged families in the City of Richmond. More than 80 years later, the nonprofit organization, run by the Richmond Times-Dispatch, continues to distribute assistance through partnerships with The



Months away from the official start of the holidays, the Richmond Christmas Mother Fund has received its first donation of the fundraising season — \$50,000 — which also happens to be one of the largest donations in the program's 84 years.

The Richmond Christmas Mother Fund offers grant money to area nonprofit organizations that help the needy during the holidays by providing food, toys, transportation and other services. The Richmond Times-Dispatch has sponsored the program since 1935, some of those years in partnership with the former afternoon newspaper, The Richmond News Leader.

This year's Richmond Christmas Mother is April Niamtu. She accepted the donation Wednesday evening from Donna Dean Stevens — widow of the late country music legend and sausage entrepreneur Jimmy Dean — and her husband, Jayson Stevens. The gift is on behalf of the Dean Foundation and in honor of Jimmy Dean, who started the foundation 25 years ago with his wife to benefit Varina-area children by offering educational scholarships and incentive programs.

The couple lived in Varina until Jimmy Dean's death in 2010.

Niamtu said she and Stevens have been friends for more than 20 years. The check

Foundation and FeedMore. Donations go toward winter coats, toys, meals, and the financial and emotional support that some Richmond families need to celebrate a truly special holiday season.

Niamtu said she and Stevens have been friends for more than 20 years. The check presentation was made in the Niamtu home shared by April and her husband, Dr. Joseph Niamtu III. They have two special needs teen sons, Joey and Evan, and she has a third son, Steve, from a previous marriage.

"I was just so touched when she shared ... that she wanted to help me" in the role of this year's Christmas Mother, Niamtu said.

Stevens said the Richmond community's neediest people could not have a bigger advocate on their side this holiday season.

"When I heard that April had been chosen — they couldn't have made a more perfect choice [and] I absolutely wanted to be the first to donate," Stevens said.

"April is the best mother in the world — her character, her courage, her beautiful spirit — I'm just so proud of her," Stevens said, adding that over the years of knowing her and Joe and their family, "I've watched them navigate through life with the challenges they've had with such grace."

She added: "I know in my heart that Jimmy would approve of our supporting April in her efforts to raise money for the children of Richmond."

Last year's Richmond Christmas Mother Fund raised more than \$205,000.

Grants from the annual fund are once again available for nonprofit organizations looking to help those in need during the holiday season with donations of food, toys and transportation or other holiday-related services.

This is the sixth consecutive year The Times-Dispatch has partnered with The Community

This is the sixth consecutive year The Times-Dispatch has partnered with The Community Foundation to provide holiday grants. To be eligible, a group must be a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that serves residents of greater Richmond. Religious institutions are eligible only if participation in any program supported by the Christmas Mother Fund benefits the greater community and is not limited by religious affiliation.

Nonprofits can seek grants for a variety of programs related to the holiday season, excluding Thanksgiving. Those programs could include offering holiday meals and food, toys, gift cards and clothing, or those that reduce social isolation or provide transportation to holiday events and celebrations. Community Foundation staff members will perform an initial review to ensure applications are eligible and complete.

The Richmond Christmas Mother Fund advisory committee will decide grant selections in October and then notify recipients so their programs can occur during Christmastime.

The grant programs allow the Richmond Christmas Mother to benefit the region, as well as the city.

The grant application deadline is 5 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 11. Apply at [www.tcfrichmond.org/christmasmother](http://www.tcfrichmond.org/christmasmother).

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[hprestidge@timesdispatch.com](mailto:hprestidge@timesdispatch.com)

(804) 649-6945