Bread winners
Rotarians, Loyola team to spread Christmas cheer
By Hilary Gowins
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At 8 a.m. Thursday, Scott Commings was surrounded by two trash bins full of a mixture of flour and water, mixing machines, other ingredients and baking tools in preparation for an expected 24 consecutive hours of bread making.

Commings had been chef at the Woodstock Country Club before becoming kitchen manager at the new Loyola University Chicago Retreat and Ecology Campus in Woodstock. He had catered the weekly lunches for the Noon Rotary Club of Woodstock, where he found out about the group’s annual Christmas Clearing House charity event.

He was joined Thursday by other volunteers, including his sous chef, Nate Chappell, and members of the Woodstock and Loyola communities at the retreat, formerly the Resurrection Retreat Center. Their goal: Bake about 1,380 loaves of bread between Thursday and Friday mornings.

“I was looking for what I could do to give back,” Commings said. “People need help more than ever today.”

The fruit of the bread-baking volunteers’ labor will be delivered to the Christmas Clearing House charity, which brings food and gifts, such as books and gloves, to Woodstock families and seniors in need, Noon Rotary purchaser Denise Graff Ponstein said.

The event began in 1970 as an effort by Woodstock Girl Scout troops, and Rotary took over the effort two years later and has organized it since.

When Graff Ponstein participated in the event in 1994, it served 410 families. This year, the list of families has reached a record number of 1,383.
Other groups and businesses volunteering for the event have donated services and goods such as trucking for procuring purchased food, free breakfast Saturday for volunteer delivery drivers and gifts for children of all ages.

Last year, Graff Ponstein said that the Rotary Club bought 1,308 loaves of bread, which cost $1,033. Commings’ call came as a relief.

“When I got the call from Scott [Commings], my first thought was, ‘Oh, now I can spend money on food somewhere else.’”

Graff Ponstein said that Rotary spent more than $36,000 on food alone this year. She expects the food cost to come to about $37,500, and expects to spend $55,000 overall. Money not spent on food will go toward toys, gift cards and other gifts.

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How to help

The Christmas Clearing House will help 1,383 families this holiday season. Donations still are being accepted to help raise money for the project, and checks may be made payable to Rotary Club of Woodstock, P.O. Box 53, Woodstock, IL 60098. Gifts are tax-deductible.

Organizers are seeking volunteer drivers to come to the warehouse at the corner of Routes 14 and 47 in Woodstock (the former Farm and Fleet building) to deliver Christmas baskets to families Saturday. The deliveries are expected to last from 8 a.m. to noon.